

LONDON READER

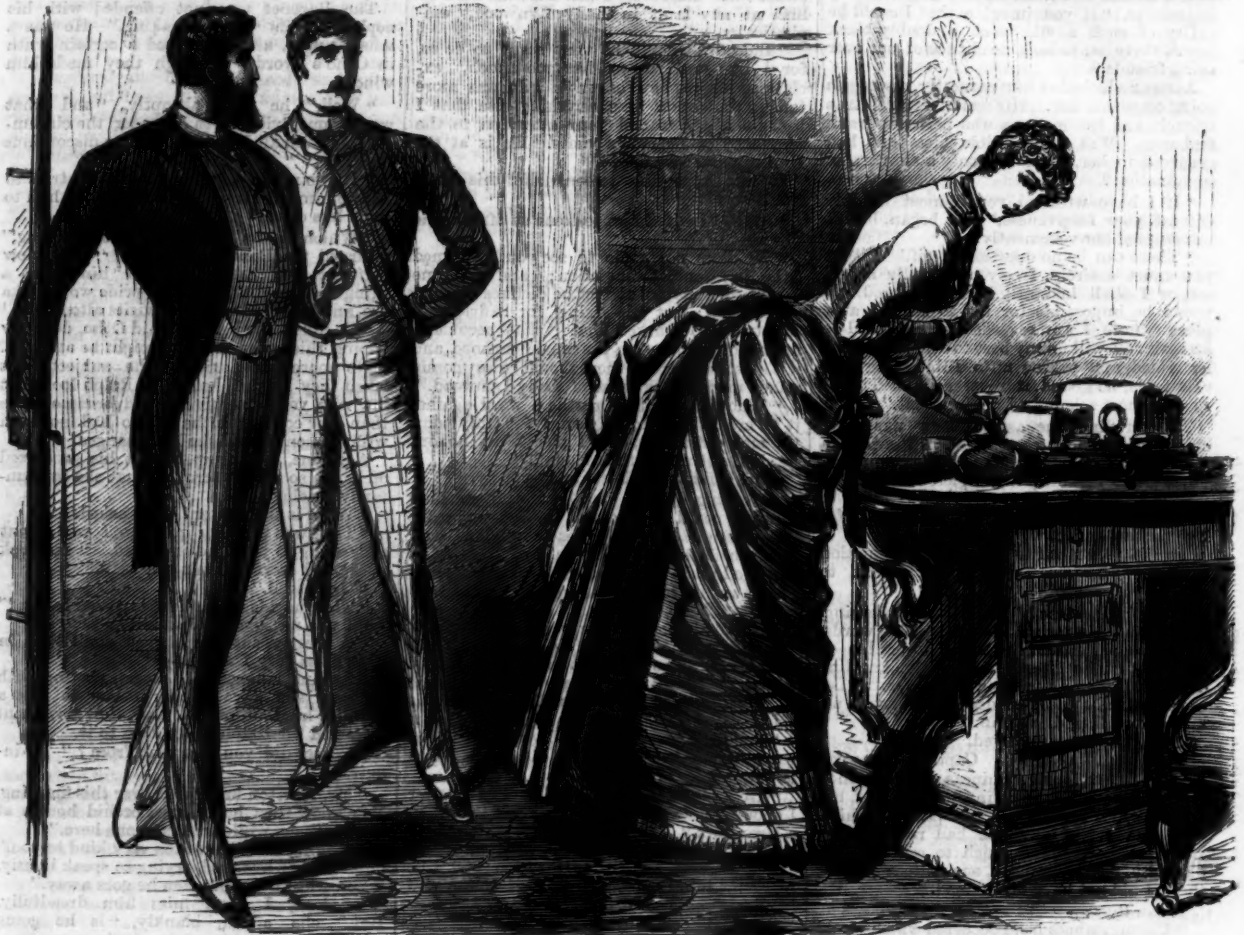
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[“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” INQUIRED SIR RALPH, STEPPING INSIDE, FOLLOWED BY HIS NEPHEW.]

THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER these events life went on for some time very quietly, both at King's Dene and Lynwood Hall, except that at the former house preparations were being made for its young mistress's approaching wedding, and a sort of bustle and excitement pervaded the servants' hall that was much appreciated by its inmates.

Lionel spent a good deal of his time poring over the musty old deeds he found in the muniment chest, but as yet he had discovered nothing to reward his search. His visits at Lynwood Hall were even more frequent than before, for he had a specific object in going. Between him and Otho a sort of armed neutrality was observed. They rarely spoke, never shook hands with each other, but there was no open rupture, and appearances were kept up, to a certain extent, on both sides.

Adrienne's manner had also changed towards Captain Lynwood; formerly her relations with him had been most friendly, but now a certain chill reserve was visible in her voice when she addressed him, and she made a point of avoiding his society as much as possible without exciting the notice of Sir Ralph.

Otho, whose policy it was to keep friendly with her, sought her one day when she was alone.

“I have intruded upon you for a special object, Lady Lynwood,” he said, his voice gravely sorrowful. “I have in some manner offended you, and I wish to know if it is possible to make reparation for a fault which, I pledge you my word, was unintentional.”

Adrienne was silent, and went on with the needlework she had laid down at his entrance.

“Believe me,” he added, after waiting a few minutes for her to speak, “I have no other than friendly sentiments towards you, and it is my earnest wish that our former intimate relations—for you treated me very differently at first—may be renewed. I am

sure Sir Ralph, too, would be very vexed at the idea of a breach between us.”

He knew pretty well the character of the girl with whom he had to deal. Adrienne was one of those gentlewomen, so pure in themselves, that the idea of evil in another is almost incredible.

She shrank in her inmost nature from believing Otho had sent her across the bridge wittingly, and yet it was difficult to think otherwise under the circumstances.

“Tell me,” he urged, “is it not true that you have ceased to regard me in the friendly light you did at first?”

“It is quite true,” she answered, candidly. “And for what reason?”

She laid down her work, and looked up at him, with her clear blue eyes.

“Can you not guess the reason?”

“I cannot—upon my soul, I cannot!” he replied, very earnestly, and his gaze met hers unflinchingly.

“My change of feeling dates from the day Fritz fell in the water while crossing the bridge to the Dene Woods,” she said, slowly.

“But, good heavens, Adrienne!” he ex-

claimed, with a start of horror that was admirably assumed. "You cannot possibly imagine I had anything to do with the accident?"

"You told me the way to go."

"Yes; but I was speaking of the second bridge. I had entirely forgotten that you were a stranger to the neighbourhood, and knew nothing about it. If," he continued, drawing himself up proudly, and speaking with a certain sorrowful dignity that was very impressive, "if you imagine that I could be guilty of such a vile, such a doubly-black crime, there is, indeed, no chance of our ever being friends."

Adrienne looked at him earnestly, a struggle going on within her. His words sounded true enough, and his manner was perfectly frank and open. Was the horrible idea that had occurred to her, after all, only a chimera of imagination?

"If I have wronged you I most humbly entreat your forgiveness," she began, but he interrupted her vehemently.

"There can be no question of 'if.' Either you must entirely, freely, and fully acquit me, or I shall instantly leave Lynwood. It would be impossible for me to remain at a place where I am regarded as a would-be assassin. I will do my best to convince you," he added, and taking up a Bible lying on a side table, he kissed it reverently. "These I swear most solemnly I am innocent."

To Adrienne the asseveration was most convincing. That anyone should swear a false oath seemed to her an utter impossibility; and instantly a complete rerational of feeling came over her, and she was ready to do anything in order to be absolved from her terrible suspicion.

The tears rushed to her eyes, and emotion made her, for a moment, quite unable to speak.

"You believe me?" said Otho, observing, with deep satisfaction, the effect of his words.

"Yes, and I can only ask you to pardon—"

"Hush!" he interrupted, gently, kneeling down, and raising her hand to his lips. "Let the wretched subject be dropped between us, and never alluded to again."

And thus it was arranged.

That same afternoon Captain Lynwood wrote a letter to Mr. Phineas Hyam, which he would not allow to go in the letter-bag, but took down to the village, and posted it himself; and yet if any one had read it they would not have found much to reward their curiosity, except, perhaps, one sentence, which they would not have understood.

It ran thus:—

"Circumstances have occurred which would have interfered with our plan of action so much that I have had to alter it; nevertheless, I think the phial will come in equally useful as if our original idea had been persevered in. By the way, do you know any one who gives good value for precious stones?"

As he was coming back from the village he met his uncle, who had just come from an interview with the churchwarden on certain parochial matters, and they walked back to the Hall together.

"Poor Adrienne will be lonely, all by herself," observed Sir Ralph, who was most solicitous regarding his young wife's comfort.

"It is not in the least probable she is by herself," retorted Otho. "Egerton is sure to be with her, and, if so, you may depend she won't be lonely."

The Baronet flashed a rapid glance at him. The words were even less significant than the tone in which they were uttered.

"Look here, Otho," he said, after a moment's consideration, "this is not the first time you have thrown out hints regarding Lionel Egerton's partiality for my wife's society, and I should like to know exactly what you mean. I am not a man given to boasting about his bush, myself, and I hate it in other people; so if you have anything to say

come to the point at once, and have done with it."

"I have no wish to beat about the bush, neither, on the other hand, do I wish to offend you by what you may term too plain-speaking, or meddling, in affairs that don't concern me."

"But they do concern you, in a measure; and, as for plain-speaking, why, the more candid you are the less likely you are to displease me. Moreover, I will allow no man to hint at any fault in Lady Lynwood," emphatically.

"Indeed, I should be very sorry to do so, for I like and respect her too much," exclaimed his nephew, eagerly. "It was more for her protection than anything else that I thought it best to call your attention to the frequency of Egerton's visits. He is at the Hall nearly every day."

It was impossible to contradict this assertion.

"Well, I invited him to come as often as he liked."

"He does not come to see you," resumed Otho, in a tone of conviction; "and as for me—well, as a matter of fact he dislikes me, and always did; but his liking for Adrienne's society is so marked that it has become a matter of comment in the neighbourhood, and it is most undesirable there should be any gossip mixed up with the name of Lady Lynwood."

"Who has dared to breathe a word against it?" cried the Baronet, fiercely. "Only point the man out to me, and I pledge my honour he shall not repeat the scandal!"

Otho smiled a little contemptuously.

"Nothing definite has been said, nothing that you could take hold of in that way; but it has been whispered—ladies have talked over it at their five o'clock teas, and men have shrugged their shoulders, and said you must expect an 'old man's darling' to amuse herself."

Bitter as he knew these words would be to Sir Ralph, Otho had hardly calculated their full effect. The Baronet became perfectly white, and his lips twitched nervously, as if he would have spoken, but could not find his voice.

"I did not mean to wound you," began the young man, but his uncle interrupted him with a quick, imperious gesture.

"Go on," he said, hoarsely. "It is better I should know the truth from your lips, than a stranger's."

"Well then, my dear uncle, will you let me ask you if it is wise to throw a girl like Adrienne into the company of a young and handsome man such as Egerton?"

"I trust her," muttered Sir Ralph.

"Yes, but her very purity will be against her in this case. She is young, ardent, and enthusiastic. She meets a man who has similar tastes—who quotes poetry, and reads romances, and, above all, looks like the hero of one of Scott's novels; and what more natural than that she should draw comparisons between him and yourself? There is no denying the fact of your being old enough to be her father, and youth burns as naturally to youth as a sunflower to the sun. Woman—the very best woman—is but weak; and so if it is possible to keep temptation from her it should be done, instead of leading her into it. Believe me, my dear uncle, I take a very sincere interest in your wife, and it is as much for her sake as yours I am speaking now."

The Baronet did not answer, but went on walking, his eyes fixed on the dusty road.

"I have noticed of late that she has grown paler, thinner, less high-spirited than she used to be," went on Lynwood, his heart beating exultantly as he thought there was now a chance of getting Egerton out of the way.

At first he had done all in his power to encourage his visits, but since that interview in the lane, on the day of Adrienne's accident, he had felt that a totally different plan must be pursued, and the preliminary was to rid him-

self of the man who was a cowardly keeping watch over his actions.

As a matter of fact, people were really beginning to notice how often Lionel was at the Hall, so that Otho's statement was not entirely without foundation, and now that he mentioned it Sir Ralph remembered that he himself had observed a certain listlessness in Adrienne's manner which used not to be there, but which he attributed to the warm weather they had lately had.

The Baronet was not offended with his nephew for his "plain-speaking." He was a sensible man, and recognised a certain truth in Otho's words, although they made him wince.

"Well," he said, abruptly, "and what would you advise me to do under the circumstances? Shall I tell Egerton to discontinue his visits?"

"By no means; but you might strive to hint to him that it would be wiser for him to come less often."

"Which means, precisely the same thing," resumed the Baronet, grimly. "You know perfectly well that if I were to 'hint' such a thing to Lionel Egerton his pride would take fire, and he would cease his visits altogether."

"So much the better," said Otho, devoutly hoping this consummation might be attained.

No more was said on the subject; but when they reached home Sir Ralph looked at his wife very attentively, and became more than ever convinced that Otho had not been wrong when he said she had changed.

Adrienne, looking up, caught his gaze fixed on her in so deep a scrutiny that she involuntarily blushed.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"That was the very question I was about addressing to you," he answered. "You look white and worn—aren't you well?"

"Quite well."

"Then how is it you have lost your colour?"

"I was not aware I had lost it."

"A pretty sure proof you don't look in your glass very frequently."

Adrienne laughed, and began playing with a flower she wore in her belt. It was a peculiar kind of orchid, and the movement attracted Sir Ralph's attention to it.

"Where did you get that from?" he inquired.

"Mr. Egerton brought it over this morning. You know they have large orchid houses at Kings' Dene, while we have none here."

"I think Mr. Egerton is very kind to you," observed her husband, trying to speak lightly. "You will miss him when he goes away."

"Indeed, I shall miss him dreadfully. But," she added, blankly, "is he going away?"

"I suppose he will, after a bit."

As Sir Ralph spoke he went to the window and looked out, but, after a few minutes, turned round again, and, going up to his wife, put both his hands on her shoulders and looked into her face.

"Adrienne," he said, "are you happy?"

The abruptness of the question startled her, and she changed colour, while her eyes drooped.

"Happy!" she repeated, falteringly.

"What do you mean?"

"Are not my words plain enough?" with some sternness. "Surely they want no explanation."

"Of course I am happy. Have I not everything I want, and are you not kindness itself?" He sighed deeply.

"Heaven knows I try to be!"

"And you succeed. What made you put such a strange question?"

"Because I have, at times, caught you looking pensive."

"Everyone is sad, sometimes," she said, evasively. "I do not think sadness in me is half as common as other people."

"But I want to keep you from it altogether. If I could have my way no shadow should ever fall upon you."

She kissed him, and raised her blue, tear-misted eyes.

"You are too good to me," he murmured. "How can I ever repay you?"

"By giving me your love, Adrienne," he answered, as he quitted the room.

Left alone, the young girl repeated his last words, and then shook her head slowly, while a deep sob broke from her breast.

His question had disturbed her, and caused her to look back on her sensations of the last few weeks under a different aspect. No, she was certainly not happy, and by degrees the knowledge of what she was not had come to her.

In spite of all Sir Ralph's goodness, his tender care and devotion, she could not give him what he craved in return. Gratitude, deep and sincere, she felt for him, but not that supreme love which is the crown of a man and woman's life!

And this was the only return he cared to accept.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It happened just at this time that Lionel's visits to the Hall were not quite so frequent as they had been, and so Sir Ralph did not give him that hint which Otho had recommended.

The truth was the young man had heard from some source or another that his friendship with Lady Lynwood had excited comment in the neighbourhood, and though he resolved not to abuse his watchful care of her safety, yet he deemed it wise, for her sake, to limit his visits. Man of the world as he was, he knew how slight a breath is needed to rally the parity of a woman's fair fame—that most fragile and delicate bloom which, once touched, is gone for ever!

Just about this time, too, it was noticed Sir Ralph himself began to look less hearty and robust than usual; and although he would not admit it, there was no denying the fact that he was considerably thinner than formerly, and that his spirits were not so good.

He cherished rather peculiar ideas with regard to his own health, boasted that he had never had a day's illness in his life, and laughed at the idea of a family physician.

"No doctor has put foot within this house for nearly fifty years, except when one of the servants happened to be ill," he would say. "My father was a healthy man, who despised medicine, and I am the same. When it's Heaven's will to take me I shall die, but not before; and as for ailments, why, I don't know what they are, and I'm not going to let a doctor teach me through his abominable drugs."

He was obstinate on this point, and vehemently negated the suggestion of having anything the matter with him, although he could not conceal from himself the fact that his long walks and rides tired him much more than they used to.

"It's the hot weather," he declared. "What can you expect when the thermometer continues over eighty in the shade?"

He did not forget what he had said to Otho about having the family diamonds reset, and, accordingly, they were brought from the Bank, where they had been in safe custody for so many years, and exhibited to Adrienne, who was absolutely dazzled by their brilliance and beauty.

"Are they not worth a great deal of money?" she asked, innocently, as she looked at them.

"Yes, a very great deal," answered Sir Ralph, while Otho, who was by at the time, added—

"Quite a fortune to a poor man!"

"I do not think they are worth resetting," declared Adrienne. "They look a little old-fashioned, perhaps, but I admire their quaintness, and would not exchange it for a modern setting."

"Then keep them as they are," said the Baronet. "You had better lock them away,

in your jewel-case, and take care the key never goes out of your possession."

"I will carry them to my dressing-room for you," said Captain Lynwood; "they and their case are almost too heavy for you to lift."

Adrienne thanked him, and accepted the offer. She did not look so elated as such a magnificent present should have made her; on the contrary, there was a pathetic wistfulness in her eyes that Otho could not understand. He did not know that each fresh evidence of her husband's generosity but increased a debt which she felt herself unable to repay.

Her anxiety on his behalf grew very great as she noticed the change that was daily taking place in his appearance, and she implored him to see a doctor.

He was rather angered by the request.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You are as foolish as Otho, who has been bothering me in the same manner. I tell you I am perfectly well."

"Then how is it your appetite has failed you?"

"My appetite was always variable; it will come back when the weather grows cooler."

"And you get tired so much sooner than you used to?"

"All attributed to the same cause. Don't you talk of looking pale, and eating little. You do both."

"At all events," said Adrienne, "renew your strength by drinking port wine, or some tonic."

"I don't require it—my lemonade does me more good than either," he replied, obstinately, and went to a side-table, and poured out a tumblerful of the beverage from a glass jug that always stood there.

This conversation took place in his study.

Further remonstrances were perfectly useless, on his wife's descent from her attempts to employ them, and left him to go to the morning-room where Otho was awaiting her. She told him the result of the interview, at which he was not at all surprised.

"In some things my uncle, usually the most reasonable of men, is absolutely pig-headed," he observed. "I don't think it is any use for you to try further persuasion; we must let him gang his ain gate."

"But I can't bear to see him losing health and vigour like this," exclaimed the girl, impulsively. "I think I shall go to a doctor, and ask him to give me some medicine that I can introduce secretly into his food—a tonic of some kind is what he needs. I feel sure."

A strange gleam came in Otho's eyes. "You must not go for it, Sir Ralph discovered it, he would be angry," he said, "but if you like I will see Dr. Seaforth, and ask him to give me some strengthening medicine which you must manage to get my uncle to take. What do you say?"

"I think it is the wisest plan," she responded.

And so, the next day, Otho put it into execution, and went to the village to pay a visit to Dr. Seaforth, who was a clever man, much above the ordinary practitioner.

On his return, he gave Adrienne a small, dark blue bottle.

"I described my uncle's symptoms as well as I was able," he said, "and the doctor thinks they indicate general debility—nothing more serious. He has given me this, which is a concentrated essence of something or other, and ten drops of which are to be taken every day. You will have no difficulty in administering them in some liquid?"

"Oh, no," said Adrienne, taking the bottle and looking at it. "I think, perhaps, I had better put it in the lemonade for Sir Ralph invariably drinks a jugful in the course of the day, and no one else ever touches it."

"Yes, I should imagine that would be as good as anything. Mind you keep the bottle locked up in some place of safety."

"I will take care of that," smiling. "I have a little medicine-chest of my own in my

dressing-room and I will put it in there, so that no one can possibly interfere with it. I hope I shall contrive to mix the drops with the lemonade without anyone seeing me."

"You had better fetch the lemonade, up yourself, and then you can be sure of doing it."

Adrienne thought the idea a good one, and adopted it, the servants rather wondering at this new fancy on her part.

For several days she managed to mix the medicine every morning, and anxiously watched to see what effect it had on her husband; but Sir Ralph certainly did not show signs of getting better; indeed, he gradually grew weaker and feebler looking.

"I do not think it does him any good," she observed, despondingly, to Otho.

"You must give it time," he answered, "you cannot expect to see any immediate effect. Indeed, Dr. Strange said it would be some time before any was visible."

"Did he? Then I suppose I had better persevere. I did not put anything in the lemonade this morning."

"Do so at once. Sir Ralph is not in his study at the present moment, so now is your best opportunity."

Adrienne went upstairs to fetch the bottle from her medicine-chest, and on her return, finding the study still unoccupied, began carefully dropping the essence into the lemonade.

While she was in the act of doing it a shadow darkened the French window, and, looking up, she beheld her husband standing outside, and regarding her action with the utmost astonishment.

She hastily slipped the bottle into her pocket, colouring as furiously as if she had been caught in the commission of some heinous crime.

"What are you doing?" inquired Sir Ralph, stepping inside, followed by his nephew.

"I was only putting some—some flavouring in your lemonade," she answered, lamely, uttering the first excuse that presented itself to her, and regretting a moment afterwards that she had not boldly told him the truth.

"Flavouring!" echoed her husband. "I don't want anything in it but lemons and water!"

"Lady Lynwood tasted it a few minutes ago when I was in the room," observed Otho, coming to Adrienne's rescue, "and said it was flavourless, and that she would put a little citric acid in it. I daresay you will find it improved by the addition."

"Improved or not I don't wish the experiment repeated!" said Sir Ralph, shortly, and noticing the frightened pallor that had succeeded her sudden flush of colour.

Adrienne was glad to escape into the garden, whither Otho presently followed her.

"I almost wish I had never commenced this business!" she exclaimed. "I hate all manner of deception so intensely that there seems to be something wrong in it, even where the object in view is a good one."

"Your idea is exaggerated, then, for there are cases where the end justifies the means, and this is certainly one of them. Do you think it would be right to allow Sir Ralph's silly prejudices against doctors to endanger his health—perhaps his life itself?"

"No; but—"

"There can be no but in the case; it is one of right and wrong simply. Sir Ralph is far from well, and if he allowed himself to go on getting worse—as he assuredly would if nothing were done for him—you would feel that you had signally failed in your duty by making no attempt to combat his obstinacy."

"At any rate, I am glad you agree with what I have done—it takes some of the responsibility off my hands."

"I entirely agree with it. If it is any satisfaction, you have the knowledge of my complete concurrence in your action."

Thus reassured, Adrienne determined to go on with what she had commenced; but she

had to be very careful how she got her husband to take the medicine, for he no longer drank the lemonade. Whether it was fancy or not he could not tell; but it seemed to him there was a curious bitter flavouring in it the day on which he had found her medicating it (as was probably the case—for in her hurry she dropped too much in); so instead of drinking it he put it away in a cupboard—with no other motive, however, than that of not vexing her by letting her see it almost untasted when she came in in the evening, as she usually did.

Still, it was not difficult to find means of introducing it in what he drank; and so every day he took the prescribed number of drops, but they failed signally of their intended effect.

For instead of improving he gradually got worse, and at last even he himself had to confess that there was something more serious the matter with him than merely the effects of the hot weather.

He had to forego his long walks, and cease the active part he had taken as a magistrate; for a very little exertion was sufficient to knock him up now, and the most he could do was to let himself be driven about in his wife's pony carriage; and yet he was as obstinate as ever, and still declined to have medical aid called in.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In spite of all the efforts that were made to discover the nocturnal intruder who had so frightened Nathalie Egerton, nothing was found out; the reward offered by Farquhar remained unclaimed, and the affair was looked upon as one of those mysteries that must be left to time to elucidate.

And so the days went on, each bringing nearer that one when the girl's sacrifice would be complete, and she would swear at the altar to love, honour, and obey the man whom she neither loved nor honoured.

Sometimes the thought of it seemed to sweep over her like a terrible wave, against which it was useless to struggle, and a hot, rebellious anger rose in her heart.

Why was such a hard lot decreed her? Why could she not enjoy such happiness as was given to other women? Why could she not marry the man she loved?

But it was too late to ask questions now, and this dark-eyed heroine of ours was not given to the indulgence of useless grief and impotent ravings against a fate which, after all, her own hands had helped to mould.

Farquhar wanted to have a grand wedding, but to this she strongly objected, and as Lionel upheld her in her objection the banker finally gave way, and said it should be as she wished; so it was arranged the ceremony should be entirely private, the only invited guests being Farquhar's sister, and Sir Ralph and Lady Lynwood.

Nathalie herself had wished the two latter to be present, as the Baronet was one of her oldest friends, and she had already conceived a deep attachment to his fair and gentle wife, whose young beauty had made a great impression on her.

Farquhar's presents were both numerous and costly, and, in accordance with his desires, his fiancée provided herself with a rich trousseau, Mr. Egerton finding the money in some peculiar way that he did not care to have inquired into too closely.

Lionel held himself quietly aloof from all these preparations; he did not, in his heart, approve of his sister's marriage, and he was not the kind of man to play the hypocrite for the sake of a rich brother-in-law.

This reticence was rather a relief to Nathalie than otherwise, for it was harder to keep up a pretence of happiness before him than before anyone else, and, as a consequence, she was glad not too have too much of his society.

"Your jewels are fit for a princess, miss," observed her maid Warren, one afternoon when they had just unpacked another *cadeau* from Farquhar—a magnificent *parure* of opals and diamonds. "I'm sure one of the queen's daughters could not have anything more splendid than these!"

"They are very beautiful!" returned the girl, a little wearily, as she glanced at them.

"Mr. Farquhar seems fond of opals," went on Warren, who was rather a superior servant, and whom Nathalie allowed to talk to her with more freedom than she had permitted any previous maid. "And yet they are supposed to be very unlucky!"

"Are they?"

"Except for people born in November. Perhaps your birthday is in November, miss?"

"No—in February."

"Then I suppose Mr. Farquhar does not believe in good and bad luck?"

"Probably not," answered Nathalie. "I don't think he is given to be superstitious."

"And yet there is such a thing as fate. What is to be will be," muttered Warren, in so gloomy a tone that her mistress looked up surprised.

"What do you mean by such an oracular sentence?" she demanded, rather startled.

"I beg your pardon, miss. I was talking to myself more than you. It's a habit I have got into lately."

"It is a very bad one," said Nathalie, a little sharply, "and the sooner you break yourself of it the better."

The woman's lips set themselves close together in a thin, disagreeable line, that made her face look rather sinister.

She had before now given indications of a temper that ill brooked control, and it seemed as if she had never been accustomed to it. Nathalie did not altogether like her, but she was an excellent maid, thoroughly conversant with her duties, and always quiet and well-behaved. These qualifications enabled her mistress to put up with a certain sullenness that characterised her.

She busied herself putting away some dresses that were lying about, while Nathalie restored the jewels to their case.

"I intended asking you whether you will care to remain in my service after—" she hesitated a moment, and bit her lip, then continued, more firmly, "after I am married?"

Warren did not answer immediately, and kept her face turned from her mistress's.

"You will live in London, then, won't you, miss?" she asked, at length.

"Yes; or, rather, I shall spend half of the year in London, and the other half probably at Mr. Farquhar's country house. If you like to continue with me, I see no reason why you should not do so."

"But perhaps you will want a more experienced maid than me when you are Mrs. Farquhar?" said Warren, and if it had not been so unlikely, Nathalie would have fancied there was a terse bitterness in the manner in which she pronounced the last two words.

"Why so?"

"Because you will go out a great deal more."

"That is likely enough," returned the young girl, who, as a matter of fact, fully intended striving to forget her sorrow in the distractions of society; "but I do not see that that need stand in your way—you may be sure you will not have more work than you are able to do. Of course, if you accept the situation, you will have to accompany me on the wedding tour."

She wondered at herself as she spoke, and the calmness with which she made these arrangements; but they had to be completed, and after all, they were very minor details compared with the one terrible fact they included.

"Where are you going for your honeymoon, miss, if I may ask?" inquired Warren.

"It is not finally decided. Mr. Farquhar has expressed a wish to go to Italy, and so 't

will probably be there. Have you any objection to foreign travel?"

"No, miss—on the contrary, I should like to go abroad."

"And will your relatives mind?"

"I have no relatives."

Nathalie looked surprised.

"No father or mother?"

"No, miss—I am quite alone, and I've got to fight my own battle with the world."

"I hope it will not be a hard one," said the young girl, gently, her sympathies aroused by this state of forlornness.

"It seems to me that things are very unequally divided here—poor people get all the pain, and rich people all the pleasures of life," exclaimed Warren, with one of those bursts of freedom in which she sometimes indulged.

Nathalie, instead of rebuking her, sighed.

"You only judge from the outside of things, Warren; perhaps if you could look into the 'rich peoples' hearts, you might be surprised at what you saw there, and reverse your opinion."

"Well, miss, take yourself for an example; what happier lot can one imagine? You are young, and handsome, and healthy, and on the point of being married to a rich and handsome man—what more can one want?"

"It sounds enviable, I admit."

"While I—" commenced Warren, with a sudden fierce passion that she was only just in time to check. "I beg your pardon," she continued, in a low contrite tone, "I'm afraid you think I forget myself and my position; but I've had a great many troubles, Miss Egerton, and sometimes I think they have been almost too much for me."

After making this confession she hurriedly left the room, afraid, perhaps, lest her mistress might utter a sharp reprimand, for in these days of her sorrow, Nathalie's own temper was sorely tried, and sometimes gave way under the strain.

"I believe she is half mad," soliloquised the girl, referring to her maid, when she was alone; "perhaps it will be better not to keep her after all. I am not very much prepossessed in her favour, and I don't think she likes me, for I have caught her looking at me in a very strange way occasionally. There is something uncanny about her."

She looked her jewel-case and went down to the library, where Lionel was sitting intent on some parchments.

"What a couple of students you and papa are!" she exclaimed, seating herself in the embrasure of the window, just where the sunshine, coloured red by the stained glass, fell about her like a glory. "He is always poring over his deeds, and you over your parchments. Have you discovered anything interesting yet?"

"A very great deal, but little to the purpose. I find that centuries ago there were subterranean passages under this house, and then they appear to have been either bricked up or demolished, for there are no indications of them now, neither can I find any mention of them in the deeds relating to King's Dene for some hundreds of years. And yet, if they had been in existence, it seems probable they would have been used during the civil war, when Charles was flying from Cromwell's soldiers."

"Certain to have been, I should imagine. They were probably done away with at the Reformation. Do you still put faith in the gipsy's prophecy regarding Uncle Cyrus's wealth?"

"I have not given up all hopes of finding it," she responded, evasively.

"Well, if you don't succeed, it won't be for lack of effort; and, for my part, I should not be surprised if, in course of time, you did bring it to light—that is to say, if it exists."

"I should have liked to have found it before you were married," said Lionel, looking at her steadily.

"Why before then?"

"Because, I fancy, it might have made some

difference in your destiny," he replied, significantly.

She shook her head, and looked down.

"Nothing will make a difference to my destiny now," she said, with quiet sadness; "it is fixed, and immutable as Fate itself. But this money, if it were found, would help you in your onward career in the future. With it, who shall say what distinction you may achieve?"

"I do not think I desire to achieve distinction. I have lost my former ambitious projects, and shall be quite content to live the life of a quiet country gentleman, far removed from the madding crowd."

"Why, Lionel, what has come to you?" exclaimed his sister, in surprise. "You used to be so eager to engage in life's battle—so anxious to secure the prizes which, you said, came to those who strive. And then your dreams of restoring the shattered fortunes of our house."

"They were dreams—the dreams of a visionary boy, to whom the world is an oyster, which he has the knife to open."

"At all events," said Nathalie slowly, and deeply disappointed at this evidence of the alteration that had taken place in her brother, "I preferred the energy and ambition of the boy to the calm content of the man."

Lionel flushed a deep red under the satire.

"Did I say I was content, Nathalie?"

"You inferred it."

"Then I did not mean to, for I am afraid such is not the case. Content very seldom falls to the lot of humanity."

"You are growing into a pessimist—you, who used to be so bright and hopeful," she said, looking at him fixedly. "I think you ought to marry, Lionel?"

"Do you? I cannot agree with you, for I think I am much better single."

"But you intend marrying some day?"

"I don't know; it is a remote contingency that I have no desire to face."

"But it is your duty to do so."

"Is it? Well, I must find someone to have me first."

"There would be no difficulty in that, as you know quite well."

"Indeed I did not know."

"There is Euphemia Lindsay, for example—anyone can see that she is really fond of you, and she is both pretty and wealthy, as well as of good family."

Lionel shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think I should care to pass through life by the side of Euphemia Lindsay."

"What fault have you to find with her?"

"None in particular—only the general one that she doesn't suit my taste."

"I don't know who does—except, Lady Lynwood."

Nathalie was looking at him rather attentively as she pronounced Adrienne's name, and thus she saw what effect it had on him. He grew white, in spite of himself, and the sudden change of colour was a revelation to his sister, whose instinct at once seized the truth.

"Lionel!" she exclaimed, speaking on the impulse of the moment, "You love her!"

"Yes," he replied, very quietly, "it is true—I love her!"

(To be continued.)

AGE CANNOT WITHER.—Lord Lindsay states that in the course of his wanderings amid the pyramids of Egypt he stumbled on a mummy, which proved by its hieroglyphics to be at least two thousand years old. Examining it after it was unwrapped he found in one of its closed hands a tuberous or bulbous root. He was interested in the question of how long vegetable life could last, and took the root from the mummy's hands and planted it in a sunny soil, allowing the rains and the dews of heaven to descend upon it, and in the course of a few weeks the root burst forth and bloomed into a most beautiful dahlia. The story is said to be well verified.

SAVED BY LOVE.

—30—

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Esme regains consciousness there comes like a flood the recollection of the bitterness through which she has passed, equalising that of death itself.

"Oh! what would I not give to forget," she murmurs, with a plaintive, little sob. "Husband gone, Lady Croyland my cruellest foe; disgraced, branded as a thief, homeless, almost penniless, and without a single friend, except my poor old father; but, thank Heaven, I can go to him—he will not turn against me."

"Are you better, madam?" asks the woman, pitying the sorrow that is stamped so indelibly on Esme's lovely face, making it Madonna-like in expression.

"Yes, thanks; I was a little overcome with fatigue, that is all," she says, wistfully, suppressing the tears that are forcing their way into her dark eyes.

"Are you a friend of Lady Croyland's?"

"Yes," she falters. "Please have the things sent on to that address," handing the good woman an envelope, with the name of the hotel she was staying at.

"I will attend to it at once, madam," is the kind reply, for she sees that Esme's emotion is of a kind to require sympathy—that cup of cold water that it is in the power of even the poorest to bestow.

Her feet refuse almost to move from the sweet spot hallowed by love's delicious memories, that seem dearer to her than ever now that they are lost, and she no longer protected by Warren's deep, true affection.

"Is there no hope?" she thinks, as a pitiful sigh escapes her colourless lips. "Can he be so cruel as to desert me without waiting to hear from me whether I am guilty or not? Oh! Warren, better far if we had never met."

"Pray do not go yet, madam," says the kind-hearted creature; "let me get you a cup of tea, and rest awhile."

"Thanks; you are very kind, but I cannot stay. Are you sure Lord Croyland left no letter, no message for—his wife?"

She was about to say, "for me," but checked herself in time, not caring to let her know that she was a deserted wife, her pride having already been humbled to the dust.

One lingering look, with the soul rushing into her eyes, spiritualising them, and Esme leaves the home which had given her loving shelter and true happiness for many months.

"Is there no pity?" she moans, stricken to the very heart by a sense of utter loneliness.

This is the burden of her plaint as she is driven home. What a mockery to call it that, where no loving smile awaits her, no tender word, no Warren, her idol, to give her even only one kiss, for which her soul hungers.

"Why does the sun shine, and people smile and look happy?" she murmurs, brokenly, "while I am so desolate that even the poorest would not exchange places with me? What evil spirit tempted me to touch the diamonds? Strong in my husband's love I might have defied Oscar. Warren gave up mother, home, everything for me, and yet I kept my fatal secret back from him—dear, faithful heart!—a secret that in one night has dug a gulf between us which a lifetime's sorrow cannot, perhaps, bridge over."

How eagerly she searches every package and trunk when they arrive, hoping to find some message secreted for her, even a reproach meant only for her eye alone.

"No, not a word, a single syllable!" she cries, as tears chase each other down her pallid cheeks.

"Oh! cruel Warren, I could not have treated you so if you were even the guiltiest of guilty criminals. My love would have been a shield to ward off the pitiless, venomous darts of spiteful tongues."

Then memory brings back his words when he said almost the same words—alas! forgotten all too soon.

"At last!" she exclaims, joyfully, as she sees an envelope in her desk with his well-known handwriting; and in a paroxysm of delight she, though blinded with tears, that come in a shower to refresh her jaded heart, pours kiss upon kiss on the paper because his hand touched it.

"Why, what is this, how dare he?" she cries, indignation scorching up the fount of her tears, as she reads "Esme Dormar." His mother has conquered, and made him disown me—I who am his wife; but they little know that Esme Dormar can give back blow for blow. He may yet crave pardon from me, and be refused. Insult upon insult—money—as if these miserable notes can solace my outraged heart; I, who a few moments ago, would have humbled myself at his feet and begged the boon of one look of love, one tender word, but now I would not sue to him—no, not if my very life depended upon my doing so. He has, by his wanton insult to me while defenceless and without a friend, stirred up my pride and made me brave. No more tears, Esme; no, keep them for a better man than a Croyland."

On the floor where it has fluttered lies a slip of paper written upon.

Swiftly she picks it up and reads with flashing eyes, thinking it might be another insult, and her lip curls scornfully as she reads the motto, "By constancy and virtue."

"Constancy! Where is it, either in mother or son?" she asks herself, derisively. "She persecuted me from the very first, and he deserts me like a craven in the hour of my need, when tempted beyond my strength I took the Croyland diamonds. Neither of them lacking constancy can possess virtue," she continues, her soul aflame with wrath. "I may be a thief in their eyes, but I stand on equal ground with them, for I was sorely tempted and tried, and being only human, fell, while they tried to crush me under their heel. Is this the nobility of a patrician family? If so, then it was an evil hour in which I allied myself to it."

Hers is a nature, once aroused, not easily quelled by misfortune, for her pride is such that it would seek to array itself in arms against the whole world.

As she paces the room like a caged lioness, what passionate memories grasp her heart!

"Coward!" she almost hisses, "to run away from me at the first breath of suspicion, and mock me with his false motto, but the hour of my triumph may yet come, when, like another Shylock, I will exact my bond and claim retribution on mother first, son afterwards."

Each time she sees the notes her wrath is kindled afresh, and it is only when the thought flashes across her mind, like an inspiration, that she might use them to good purpose, that she says exultingly, and without a trace of anger in her tones,—

"Yes, yes, that will be grand. I can buy back the diamond bracelet from Oscar, restore the jewels intact, and then, when my husband seeks a reconciliation, treat his overtures with contempt. That will be a revenge fitting for the insult he has put upon me. I was contrite, ready to acknowledge my fault, but his words, Esme Dormar, have turned my heart to adamant, and hardened my face against him and his mother."

Without counting the notes she hurriedly placed them in her pocket, and, leaving the room in disorder, she was driven to the railway station.

"My father will protect me against the Croylands," she murmurs proudly, as the train speeds on its way. "I neglected him in my prosperity, but he will forgive me, I know, now that black, bitter adversary threatens to crush me."

A glad little cry escapes her as she sees the cottage where she expects to find a haven, loving arms to welcome her, and a loving heart on which to rest her weary head.

"It is humble," she thinks, "but neither envy, hatred, or malice find a dwelling in it."

I wish now I had never been tempted to leave its walls to climb the dizzy heights of ambition, from which I have fallen in a night so low that even my husband forgets I am his wife, and styles me by my maiden name. I could have forgiven him anything but that."

The evening is very still, the white-stemmed silver-leaved birch-trees scarcely move a twig; only a ripple on the broad river, and the splash of its mimic waves tell that the wind has not quite gone to sleep with the sun, which has left the opposite sky full of soft rose tints that spread till they melt in the yellow grey in the gloaming.

It is a cosy, homely cottage down in a hollow, with woodbine and honeysuckle trailing over its rustic porch, all blossom and fragrance.

A look of disappointment comes into her face as she fails to find the old sea captain in his favourite seat in the garden, and her heart sinks with the presentiment that after all she is too late, and death has snatched away the only friend she could lean upon for comfort and support.

"You here, Oscar Vichi! Have you not done harm enough without coming here to inflict pain upon my poor old father?" she exclaims, indignantly, as he comes forward to meet her.

"Do not be too hard upon a poor unfortunate fellow like me," he says, deprecatingly.

"Unfortunate—yes, not only to yourself, but to others. Stay here; I wish to speak to you again after I have seen my father."

"He is—"

"Not dead!" she cries, seizing his arm nervously, all colour forsaking her face.

"No, Eame, only gone to sea again; that is all."

As the tide of joy rushes over her heart once more she asks,—

"What brings you down here, then?"

"To see you."

"To restore the bracelet, I hope; and that you have come to your better self, and can see how ignoble it is to persecute a woman."

"I wish I could say 'yes' to that," he replies, humbly.

"How much did you get for the bracelet?" she asks, withering him with a look of contempt.

"Not very much, as ill-luck made me, etake it on cards, and I lost, as usual."

"Then why are you here? You have received the price of your silence, and ought to keep away from anyone bearing the name of Dormar."

"This is said so passionately that the words cut him like the lash of a whip, and arouses the worst part of his nature."

"My price, perhaps, is higher than you appraise it," he says, meekly. "What if I tell you that I want more money, and must have it?"

"Must!" she cries, scornfully. "You have brought me to the verge of ruin. I cannot go much lower, Oscar Vichi."

"You are still Lady Croyland; they cannot take that away from you. Surely the title is worth more than a diamond bracelet? Shall I speak out, Eame Dormar?"

There is a veiled menace in this question that makes her wince and turn pale, and when she speaks a thread of entreaty runs through her words.

"Oscar, you would not quite ruin me, and bring my poor old father's grey hairs with sorrow and shame to the grave?"

"Well, I am desperate, and am in need of funds. Perhaps I might win back the bracelet if you were to give me more money, not as a bribe, but a loan. Come, Eame, I only want help. Give me another chance to get away from England and from temptation!"

"Which you will never resist as long as there is a card or dice, or board of green cloth in existence, and gamblers to help you to ruin and debauch yourself."

"I am fit no more to listen to sermons. I

came here because you left no address in London."

"Surely you did not dare to ask Lord Croyland about me?"

"I saw him," he replies, a gleam of mischief in his eyes, as if it is a pleasure to tease her.

"You did!" she cries, an expression of compressed rage leaping into her face, causing her eyes to become black as night from the dilation of their pupils, her brow to contract, her lips to whiten, and her whole youth and beauty to become deformed.

Even he recoils before this spectacle, and hastens to explain, saying,—

"You wrong me by your suspicions, Eame. I thought to find you in the garden, but your husband was there, and tried to reach me. I escaped without a word passing between us. There, that is the solemn truth!"

Such a sigh of intense relief escapes her, now that a load of fear has been lifted from off her heart, that she willingly places half the notes in his hand, which is stretched out so greedily to receive them.

"You will not regret your kindness," he says, tremulously, eager to get away to try his luck once more, and to retrieve his fortunes. "Good-bye. If I win where shall I send the bracelet?"

"Bring it to me here," she says, a little wearily, for she has no confidence in him.

"All right. I will know my fate to-night."

"Will you write me just one line as to the result?" she asks, anxiously.

"Yes, and now I must be off. Your secret is safe with me."

"Yes, as long as I can bribe you with money or jewels; but not one more diamond will you wrest from me. My one earnest purpose shall be to regain that bracelet; but how is it to be accomplished with such a man as you to deal with?" she thinks, bitterly, as she watches him pass up the Glen.

The answer came—only two words,—

"Lost.—OSCAR."

CHAPTER XI.

It is September in the Highlands, and the sun is up toiling from east to west his rays falling fresh and cool upon the long sweeps of grass and upon the gentler swaying foliage of the trees on which the sparrows are keeping house so busily.

Dame Nature is lavish of her jewels this morning; she is wearing them all apparently, and amongst the grass they lie thickly scattered sparkling and gleaming in the sunshine.

Across the railway, on the hillside where the sheep are breakfasting up to the grand old castellated mansion, on every shrub and bush and blade of grass she has hung her diamonds.

Eame has found a peaceful refuge in these Highland wilds as companion to the Countess of Douglas.

"If only he would not press his attentions upon me I could feel almost happy in this delightful haven of rest," she soliloquises, as she stands by a fountain that throws its spray up into the golden sunlight.

"Good morning, Miss Spartelli," says a deep, manly voice, that causes her to start, but not with pleasure, as she turns, and replies, coldly,—

"Good morning, my lord," and is passing on when he says,—

"Do not run away. Am I such an ogre as to frighten you?"

"Indeed, no; but I think the Countess would object to my holding a tête-à-tête in the early morning with you."

"Why should she? What harm can there be in my stopping to speak to the fairest flower in all Deeside?"

"But remember I am only a dependent of the house of Douglas. Rumour speaks of your engagement to Lady Margaret, and I have no wish to be found here at such a time alone with you; but pardon my plain speak-

ing, my lord; I have a duty to perform to my self."

"Rumour is not always reliable, fair lady," he returns, banteringly. "I am as free as air except for a pair of dark, witching eyes that have stolen into my heart," looking at her with a world of passion in his honest grey eyes.

"Eyes may be innocent of any such intention," she replies, frigidly. "Hearts are too susceptible, and need carbing."

"Ah! but supposing love takes the bit in its mouth and runs away with one's heart, what then?"

"I cannot stay to discuss such silly nonsense, my lord, as I am wanted upstairs. Life is too real to be frittered away in soft, unmeaning speeches that amuse some, but give deep pain to others."

"Nay, I would rather suffer anything than inflict pain upon you," he says, earnestly, too much so to afford her satisfaction, lest in pressing his unwelcome suit too ardently and openly he should draw the attention of the Countess to her.

She did not care to hear any more of his rhapsodies, but hastened away, running up the broad terrace steps with a grace all her own.

"What a lovely creature, but how cold and pulseless, just like a statue! Oh! for the power of thawing her marble heart, and waking her into glowing love, warm and palpitating like Pygmalion did his Galatea!" he murmurs, as his eyes follow her every movement with rapt admiration.

He little dreams how she has responded to the voice of love with quickened pulse, beaming eyes, and throbbing heart—a very Hebe and not marble, for nature had intended one so lovely to be the delight of the heart of man, and in Warren Croyland she had found a fitting mate.

"Why will he persist in pestering me with words of love?" she pants; "I who gave my heart in exchange for a stone, that has crushed all love out of it and made a wreck of my life, until now all I long for is rest and seclusion."

There is a piteous, hunted look in her dusky eyes that would have made Warren weep tears of anguish to see, as he vainly strives to forget that he has a wife—a woman whom he still loves madly, and with all the passion of a first love.

"Good morning, my dear," says the Countess, as Eame enters the morning-room, bringing in a rush of sweet-scented heather and fragrant ozone distilled from nature's inexhaustible laboratory. "Are there many letters?"

"Five only, my lady," trying to look and speak cheerfully, but failing, for she has not quite recovered from her feeling of annoyance.

The Countess of Douglas is very observant, and quickly discerns that something has happened to vex her companion, and says kindly, but stately,—

"Have you had any bad news, Miss Spartelli?"

"Oh, no, your ladyship; I have a slight headache, that is all, and thought the morning air would relieve it."

"You must rest instead of reading to me; I will excuse you," returns the Countess, as she peruses her letters, one of which is from her daughter. "Should you not get better soon you must see my physician. Perhaps our Scottish air is too strong for you."

"I cannot even give way to the slightest emotion without her noticing it," thinks Eame, bitterly, feeling her dependence heavily, as a little blush suffuses her face at the sweet conscious feeling of approaching maternity, that she wishes to hide from the outer world as long as she can, lest she should be cast adrift upon the world as one who had strayed from the paths of virtue.

"Indeed, I am quite well," she says aloud, "and an hour's quiet will quite restore me; if you will kindly excuse me now."

"Certainly, my dear. Perhaps I shall attend to you," returns Lady Douglas, with a little

condescending and that suits Esme's proud nature to the quick, but she has learnt to suppress her emotion when on guard, and wears a smiling mask often, although tears are ready to flow from her eyes in showers.

As the Countess sits with a breakfast fit for a Sybarite, the delicious morning breeze stealing in from the hillside through the open windows, she muses,—

"What a strange girl she is! I cannot quite understand her. She is obedient, docile, and very charming, but there is such an ungirlish reticence about her past that, unless I had received so flattering a recommendation from the old rector I should almost think she possessed a history."

Yes, such a one as you, born into the purple, my Lady Douglas, can never guess at, or she, poor girl, be made to reveal; for under her gentle exterior she has a will of iron, and would die rather than reveal that past about which you so idly speculate.

"I have a horror of anything secretive being near," the Countess murmurs, with a shudder. "One is never safe. I trust she will not turn out to be deceiving me and the kind old rector. I never pardon deceit, no, not even in my own child."

A hard expression steals into her still comely face, as if no punishment would be too severe for such an offence, forgetting that temptation assails the poor and friendless, while it beats in vain against the rocky foundation on which the wealthy rest.

"Deceit has worked mischief enough in the family of my dearest friend, Lady Croylard, whose hopes of a happy old age are entirely shattered by the unscrupulous conduct of that silly boy of hers. My Margaret has had a fortunate escape. He might have broken her heart by taking up with some adventuress after marriage. His miserable wife has not even the consolation of filling the position she inveigled him into, confiding in her."

Had she only been known a little of the truth Esme would not have remained under her roof one single hour.

The world at least her portion of it, credited the Countess with the possession of that charity which covereth a multitude of sins, for she was so liberal, her smiles so beneficent; but under all this there is the stern Puritan, ready to hang a net on Monday for killing a mouse on Sunday. Such a character was not likely to look leniently on any offence against society, especially of her own class.

As poor Esme sits up in her pretty room so simple, yet so tastefully in its surroundings, where everything speaks of virgin purity, with its delicate white coverings for chairs, ottomans, couches, &c., her mind takes a retrospective leap, and looks back over the sink of the past where, so many hopes and aspirations lay buried never to rise again.

"Fool that I was to hazard my all upon that bracelet!" she thinks, angrily. "He imposed me with the same reckless spirit, and I gave him my last bank note in the vain hope that he would wrest back the missing Croylard diamonds. It beggared me and made me the dependent I now am—a lady of title, the equal of the woman I now serve so humbly. Why cannot I be brave enough to cry quits with the Croylards by making the jewels serve my necessities? It would be a splendid revenge, and I could in other lands forget that there is such a land as England."

Her hand rests on the packet of diamonds, when there flashes across her a consciousness of her sweet secret, that soon another would come to share her sorrow, or be crushed under the weight of the world's censure.

"No, lay there until the day of restitution," she cries, so passionately that her words sound like a hiss; "they shall never brand a child of mine with its mother's theft, which I consider untrue, for as Warren's wife I had, and still have, every right to the jewels. It pleases me to think that she, his haughty mother, dare not accuse me openly; what she must suffer in keeping silent, she should

knows. Warren is not with her, and in her old age she is without one consolation, one home-link. She had no pity on me, but yet when I think of her loneliness I am almost tempted to pray for her."

Presently the old temptation comes over her to put on the diamonds, for which she has risked so much, even to the severance of love that once had been so dear to her, so satisfying.

"Yes, they become me," she cries, with a gleam of triumph in her eyes. "I have them, and will never give them up until he leads me to Croylands, and I become undisputed mistress there. I have suffered through them, and they must bring me a fitting recompense."

How they flash and sparkle, speaking, as it were, with tongues of fire, these gems conceived in nature's laboratory, where they had lain for countless ages!

"Glorious things, my dream of power!" she exclaims, apostrophising them. "What magic there is in your touch, what wealth! You are fit companions for monarchs, and yet you rest contentedly on my bosom, although I am only a companion, earning my daily bread by anguish and humiliation."

So absorbed is she that she does not hear a gentle tap at the door, or notice that Rivers, the maid, has entered, and is staring at Esme in amazement.

All at once she sees the woman's face in the glass, and notices how her eyes are fixed upon the gems.

In a moment she snatches up a plaid and covers her shoulders and bust, shutting out the tell-tale diamonds.

"Don't hide them, miss, they are worth looking at," says Rivers animatedly; "why, my lady, the Countess has nothing to equal them."

"Rahaw!" laughs Esme, in a forced manner, "they are only paste, Rivers, sent me from Paris by a friend, and I was compassing myself by trying their effect."

"I never saw paste flash as those Miss Spartelli," says the canny Scotch woman. "I have seen and handled too many in my day to be easily deceived. Will you permit me to look at them?"

"They are not worth a thought, Rivers," says Esme, testily, "I am ashamed of being discovered masquerading in rubbish. Does her ladyship want me?"

"No, I simply came to ask what you would like for lunch, or if you are well enough to join my lady in the dining-room?"

"I will come directly; but stay, Rivers, you will not mention my foolish vanity to her ladyship, will you?"

"I am not in the habit of carrying tales, miss," she returns somewhat sourly; "certain little matters that come to my notice I keep to myself. Speech is silver, but silence is golden"—this significantly, that brings the blood up into the girl's conscious face, for she feels that Rivers has penetrated her secret, which as the months pass bring fresh cares and anxieties.

CHAPTER XII.

"Why will you persist in evading me?" asks Lord MacIvor, taking Esme's hand and holding it in a firm, but gentle, grip, one evening in the twilight, when the gray mists are gathering on the heather-covered hills. "What can I say or do to convince you how dear you are to me?"

"I only wish you would cease to even think of me," she says, softly, for being only a woman she can feel for his hopeless pursuit of her. "I have no heart, it is dead—buried in the past."

"But I could warm it back into life, sweet Esme, better that yours should revive than mine be killed too. I only ask to be permitted to speak to you of my love; I can wait patiently for its fruition."

"Oh, no! you must not, indeed, you must not. I tell you plainly, truthfully, that no man living has the power to awaken my heart; it is satisfied, and only wants rest and peace."

"But that means stagnation. You were never intended to lead such a dull anchorite's life; as my wife you would assume the position that your beauty entitles you to—you would govern and command instead of serving in the ranks, and make the sweetest chateleine in all bonny Scotland."

"But you forget your family, and what is due to them."

"In what way?" he asks, impatiently.

She is silent for some moments, thinking how she could prove to him by bitter experience that a *mesalliance* is visited upon the defenceless head of the ambitious wife, who, all too soon, learns that a coronet may be stuffed with thorns.

"It is idle to argue with you, my lord, because passion blinds you," she says, calmly. "I, standing outside your charmed circle, can see the danger any woman would incur by marrying above her in station."

"Granted; for the sake of argument," he cries, "but I deny that my family are superior to you. There is a nobility of beauty and grace that few can aspire to; you would confer an honour upon me by becoming my wife. Oh! Esme, why will you not see how deep, how true my love is for you, and give up your opposition? I have title, wealth, and lay all at your feet."

"Would that Warren were here to listen to these impassioned words," she thinks, with a pensive smile, "then the despised Esme Dornar would assume an importance in his eyes that she now lacks."

Her silence seems to give her noble woeer some hope, for he raises her hand to his lips in a sudden transport of hope and joy, which causes her pain, knowing well that he might as well sigh for the moon as for her.

"My lord, it grieves me to say so many times," she falters, "but it can never be anything else but that. Cease to think of me; there are others fairer than I am with hearts that have not been scared and blighted."

"I see it all," he says, bitterly, "you have loved, and been cruelly treated. Cast such a past of sorrow behind you and live for a happy future, with the bright sun of love to chase away every cloud and to make you once more a happy being, such as I would give half my fortune to see."

"Would that I dared give you hope," he sighs, "for, indeed, your devotion should not go unrequited; but I cannot say yes, for your sake as much as my own."

Looking into her face he sees there a tenderness that shows him she has a heart, and that what he thought marble is real flesh and blood, pulsating with human emotions that do credit to her woman's nature.

"I will still persevere," he thinks; "already she begins to thaw, and I may yet win her love, which to me would be the greatest of earthly treasures."

"My paradise is still open to me, and I can look through the gates at my Eve if I cannot enter," he says, enigmatically.

But she understood his meaning, and chivers when she thinks how hopeless this every effort will be to win her from her allegiance as Warren Croylard's wife.

"I cannot take away hope from your heart; indeed, it would be cruel to do so," she says, sadly. "Let me be a sister to you; I have no brother or protector, and one day, may need both."

Her little hand is held out frankly, and a sweet smile of entreaty hovers around her pretty mouth as she says this.

Loving her as he does, all too well for his own peace of mind, he is glad of any compromise that still keeps him within the pale of her life, and says, as he clasps the white fragile thing in his,—

"Yes, Esme, I will be all that, and more to you both, now and evermore."

Once more he raises the hand he holds to his lips, and then suffers her to depart, and watches her with yearning, longing eyes of love as she floats away into the misty shadows and is lost to his sight.

had to be very careful how she got her husband to take the medicine, for he no longer drank the lemonade. Whether it was fancy or not he could not tell; but it seemed to him there was a curiously bitter flavouring in the day on which he had found her medicating it (as was probably the case—for in her hurry she dropped too much in); so instead of drinking it he put it away in a cupboard—with no other motive, however, than that of not vexing her by letting her see it almost untasted when she came in in the evening, as she usually did.

Still, it was not difficult to find means of introducing it in what he drank; and so every day he took the prescribed number of drops, but they failed signally of their intended effect.

For instead of improving he gradually got worse, and at last even he himself had to confess that there was something more serious the matter with him than merely the effects of the hot weather.

He had to forego his long walks, and cease the active part he had taken as a magistrate; for a very little exertion was sufficient to knock him up now, and the most he could do was to let himself be driven about in his wife's pony carriage; and yet he was as obstinate as ever, and still declined to have medical aid called in.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In spite of all the efforts that were made to discover the nocturnal intruder who had so frightened Nathalie Egerton, nothing was found out; the reward offered by Farquhar remained unclaimed, and the affair was looked upon as one of those mysteries that must be left to time to elucidate.

And so the days went on, each bringing nearer that one when the girl's sacrifice would be complete, and she would swear at the altar to love, honour, and obey the man whom she neither loved nor honoured.

Sometimes the thought of it seemed to sweep over her like a terrible wave, against which it was useless to struggle, and a hot, rebellious anger rose in her heart.

Why was such a hard lot decreed her? Why could she not enjoy such happiness as was given to other women? Why could she not marry the man she loved?

But it was too late to ask questions now, and this dark-eyed heroine of ours was not given to the indulgence of useless grief and impotent ravings against a fate which, after all, her own hands had helped to mould.

Farquhar wanted to have a grand wedding, but to this she strongly objected, and as Lionel upheld her in her objection the banker finally gave way, and said it should be as she wished; so it was arranged the ceremony should be entirely private, the only invited guests being Farquhar's sister, and Sir Ralph and Lady Lynwood.

Nathalie herself had wished the two latter to be present, as the Baronet was one of her oldest friends, and she had already conceived a deep attachment to his fair and gentle wife, whose young beauty had made a great impression on her.

Farquhar's presents were both numerous and costly, and, in accordance with his desires, his fiancée provided herself with a rich trousseau, Mr. Egerton finding the money in some peculiar way that he did not care to have inquired into too closely.

Lionel held himself quietly aloof from all these preparations; he did not, in his heart, approve of his sister's marriage, and he was not the kind of man to play the hypocrite for the sake of a rich brother-in-law.

This reticence was rather a relief to Nathalie than otherwise, for it was harder to keep up a pretence of happiness before him than before anyone else, and, as a consequence, she was glad not too have too much of his society.

"Your jewels are fit for a princess, miss," observed her maid Warren, one afternoon when they had just unpacked another *cadeau* from Farquhar—a magnificent *parure* of opals and diamonds. "I'm sure one of the queen's daughters could not have anything more splendid than these!"

"They are very beautiful!" returned the girl, a little wearily, as she glanced at them.

"Mr. Farquhar seems fond of opals," went on Warren, who was rather a superior servant, and whom Nathalie allowed to talk to her with more freedom than she had permitted any previous maid. "And yet they are supposed to be very unlucky!"

"Are they?"

"Except for people born in November. Perhaps your birthday is in November, miss?"

"No—in February."

"Then I suppose Mr. Farquhar does not believe in good and bad luck?"

"Probably not," answered Nathalie. "I don't think he is given to be superstitious."

"And yet there is such a thing as fate. What is to be will be," muttered Warren, in so gloomy a tone that her mistress looked up surprised.

"What do you mean by such an oracular sentence?" she demanded, rather startled.

"I beg your pardon, miss. I was talking to myself more than to you. It's a habit I have got into lately."

"It is a very bad one," said Nathalie, a little sharply, "and the sooner you break yourself of it the better."

The woman's lips set themselves close together in a thin, disagreeable line, that made her face look rather sinister.

She had before now given indications of a temper that ill brooked control, and it seemed as if she had never been accustomed to it. Nathalie did not altogether like her, but she was an excellent maid, thoroughly conversant with her duties, and always quiet and well-behaved. These qualifications enabled her mistress to put up with a certain sullenness that characterised her.

She busied herself putting away some dresses that were lying about, while Nathalie restored the jewels to their case.

"I intended asking you whether you will care to remain in my service after—" she hesitated a moment, and bit her lip, then continued, more firmly, "after I am married?"

Warren did not answer immediately, and kept her face turned from her mistress's.

"You will live in London then, won't you, miss?" she asked, at length.

"Yes; or, rather, I shall spend half of the year in London, and the other half probably at Mr. Farquhar's country house. If you like to continue with me, I see no reason why you should not do so."

"But perhaps you will want a more experienced maid than me when you are Mrs. Farquhar?" said Warren, and if it had not been so unlikely, Nathalie would have fancied there was a terse bitterness in the manner in which she pronounced the last two words.

"Why so?"

"Because you will go out a great deal more."

"That is likely enough," returned the young girl, who, as a matter of fact, fully intended striving to forget her sorrow in the distractions of society; "but I do not see that that need stand in your way—you may be sure you will not have more work than you are able to do. Of course, if you accept the situation, you will have to accompany me on the wedding tour."

She wondered at herself as she spoke, and the calmness with which she made these arrangements; but they had to be completed, and after all, they were very minor details compared with the one terrible fact they included.

"Where are you going for your honeymoon, miss, if I may ask?" inquired Warren.

"It is not finally decided. Mr. Farquhar has expressed a wish to go to Italy, and so it

will probably be there. Have you any objection to foreign travel?"

"No, miss—on the contrary, I should like to go abroad."

"And will your relatives mind?"

"I have no relatives."

Nathalie looked surprised.

"No father or mother?"

"No, miss—I am quite alone, and I've got to fight my own battle with the world."

"I hope it will not be a hard one," said the young girl, gently, her sympathies aroused by this state of forlornness.

"It seems to me that things are very unequally divided here—poor people get all the pain, and rich people all the pleasures of life," exclaimed Warren, with one of those bursts of freedom in which she sometimes indulged.

Nathalie, instead of rebuking her, sighed.

"You only judge from the outside of things, Warren; perhaps if you could look into the 'rich peoples' hearts, you might be surprised at what you saw there, and reverse your opinion."

"Well, miss, take yourself for an example; what happier lot can one imagine? You are young, and handsome, and healthy, and on the point of being married to a rich and handsome man—what more can one want?"

"It sounds enviable, I admit."

"While I—" commenced Warren, with a sudden fierce passion that she was only just in time to check, "I beg your pardon," she continued, in a low contrite tone, "I'm afraid you think I forget myself and my position; but I've had a great many troubles, Miss Egerton, and sometimes I think they have been almost too much for me."

After making this confession she hurriedly left the room, afraid, perhaps, lest her mistress might utter a sharp reprimand, for in these days of her sorrow, Nathalie's own temper was sorely tried, and sometimes gave way under the strain.

"I believe she is half mad," soliloquised the girl, referring to her maid, when she was alone; "perhaps it will be better not to keep her after all. I am not very much prepossessed in her favour, and I don't think she likes me, for I have caught her looking at me in a very strange way occasionally. There is something uncanny about her."

She locked her jewel-case and went down to the library, where Lionel was sitting intent on some parchments.

"What a couple of students you and papa are!" she exclaimed, seating herself in the embrasure of the window, just where the sunshine, coloured red by the stained glass, fell about her like a glory. "He is always poring over his deeds, and you over your parchments. Have you discovered anything interesting yet?"

"A very great deal, but little to the purpose. I find that centuries ago there were subterranean passages under this house, and then they appear to have been either bricked up or demolished, for there are no indications of them now, neither can I find any mention of them in the deeds relating to King's Dene for some hundreds of years. And yet, if they had been in existence, it seems probable they would have been used during the civil war, when Charles was flying from Cromwell's soldiers."

"Certain to have been, I should imagine. They were probably done away with at the Reformation. Do you still put faith in the gipsy's prophecy regarding Uncle Cyrus's wealth?"

"I have not given up all hopes of finding it," he responded, evasively.

"Well, if you don't succeed, it won't be for lack of effort; and, for my part, I should not be surprised if, in course of time, you did bring it to light—that is to say, if it exists."

"I should have liked to have found it before you were married," said Lionel, looking at her steadily.

"Why before then?"

"Because, I fancy, it might have made some

difference in your destiny," he replied, significantly.

She shook her head, and looked down. "Nothing will make a difference to my destiny now," she said, with quiet sadness; "it is fixed, and immutable as Fate itself. But this money, if it were found, would help you in your onward career in the future. With it, who shall say what distinction you may achieve?"

"I do not think I desire to achieve distinction. I have lost my former ambitious projects, and shall be quite content to live the life of a quiet country gentleman, far removed from the 'madding crowd.'"

"Why, Lionel, what has come to you?" exclaimed his sister, in surprise. "You used to be so eager to engage in life's battle—so anxious to secure the prizes which, you said, came to those who strove. And then your dreams of restoring the shattered fortunes of our house."

"They were dreams—the dreams of a visionary boy, to whom the world is an oyster, which he has the knife to open."

"At all events," said Nathalie slowly, and deeply disappointed at this evidence of the alteration that had taken place in her brother, "I preferred the energy and ambition of the boy to the calm content of the man."

Lionel flushed a deep red under the satire.

"Did I say I was content, Nathalie?"

"You inferred it."

"Then I did not mean to, for I am afraid such is not the case. Content very seldom falls to the lot of humanity."

"You are growing into a pessimist—you, who used to be so bright and hopeful," she said, looking at him fixedly. "I think you ought to marry, Lionel?"

"Do you? I cannot agree with you, for I think I am much better single."

"But you intend marrying some day?"

"I don't know; it is a remote contingency that I have no desire to face."

"But it is your duty to do so."

"Is it? Well, I must find someone to have me first."

"There would be no difficulty in that, as you know quite well."

"Indeed I did not know."

"There is Euphemia Lindsay, for example—anyone can see that she is really fond of you, and she is both pretty and wealthy, as well as of good family."

Lionel shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think I should care to pass through life by the side of Euphemia Lindsay."

"What fault have you to find with her?"

"None in particular—only the general one that she doesn't suit my taste."

"I don't know who does—except Lady Lynwood."

Nathalie was looking at him rather attentively as she pronounced Adrienne's name, and thus she saw what effect it had on him. He grew white, in spite of himself, and the sudden change of colour was a revelation to his sister, whose instinct at once seized the truth.

"Lionel!" she exclaimed, speaking on the impulse of the moment, "You love her!"

"Yes," he replied, very quietly, "it is true—I love her!"

(To be continued.)

AGE CANNOT WITHER.—Lord Lindsay states that in the course of his wanderings amid the pyramids of Egypt he stumbled on a mummy, which proved by its hieroglyphics to be at least two thousand years old. Examining it after it was unwrapped he found in one of its closed hands a tuberous or bulbous root. He was interested in the question of how long vegetable life could last, and took the root from the mummy's hands and planted it in a sunny soil, allowing the rains and the dews of heaven to descend upon it, and in the course of a few weeks the root burst forth and bloomed into a most beautiful dahlia. The story is said to be well verified.

SAVED BY LOVE.

—O—

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Esme regains consciousness there comes like a flood the recollection of the bitterness through which she has passed, equaling that of death itself.

"Oh! what would I not give to forget," she murmurs, with a plaintive, little sob. "Husband gone, Lady Croyland my cruellest foe; disgraced, branded as a thief, homeless, almost penniless, and without a single friend, except my poor old father; but, thank Heaven, I can go to him—he will not turn against me."

"Are you better, madam?" asks the woman, pitying the sorrow that is stamped so indelibly on Esme's lovely face, making it Madonna-like in expression.

"Yes, thanks; I was a little overcome with fatigue, that is all," she says, wistfully, suppressing the tears that are forcing their way into her dark eyes.

"Are you a friend of Lady Croyland's?"

"Yes," she falters. "Please have the things sent on to that address," handing the good woman an envelope, with the name of the hotel she was staying at.

"I will attend to it at once, madam," is the kind reply, for she sees that Esme's emotion is of a kind to require sympathy—that cup of cold water that it is in the power of even the poorest to bestow.

Her feet refuse almost to move from the sweet spot hallowed by love's delicious memories, that seem dearer to her than ever now that they are lost, and she no longer protected by Warren's deep, true affection.

"Is there no hope?" she thinks, as a pitiful sigh escapes her colourless lips. "Can he be so cruel as to desert me without waiting to hear from me whether I am guilty or not? Oh! Warren, better far if we had never met." "Pray do not go yet, madam," says the kind-hearted creature; "let me get you a cup of tea, and rest awhile."

"Thanks; you are very kind, but I cannot stay. Are you sure Lord Croyland left no letter, no message for—his wife?"

She was about to say, "for me," but checked herself in time, not caring to let her know that she was a deserted wife, her pride having already been humbled to the dust.

One lingering look, with the soul rushing into her eyes, spiritualising them, and Esme leaves the home which had given her loving shelter and true happiness for many months.

"Is there no pity?" she moans, stricken to the very heart by a sense of utter loneliness.

This is the burden of her plaint as she is driven home. What a mockery to call it that, where no loving smile awaits her, no tender word, no Warren, her idol, to give her even only one kiss, for which her soul hungers.

"Why does the sun shine, and people smile and look happy?" she murmurs, brokenly, "while I am so desolate that even the poorest would not exchange places with me? What evil spirit tempted me to touch the diamonds?"

Strong in my husband's love I might have defied Oscar. Warren gave up mother, home, everything for me, and yet I kept my fatal secret back from him—dear, faithful heart!—a secret that in one night has dug a gulf between us which a lifetime's sorrow cannot, perhaps, bridge over."

How eagerly she searches every package and trunk when they arrive, hoping to find some message secreted for her, even a reproach meant only for her eye alone.

"No, not a word, a single syllable!" she cries, as tears chase each other down her pallid cheeks.

"Oh! cruel Warren, I could not have treated you so if you were even the guiltiest of guilty criminals. My love would have been a shield to ward off the pitiless, venomous darts of spiteful tongues."

Then memory brings back his words when he said almost the same words—alas! forgotten all too soon.

"At last!" she exclaims, joyfully, as she sees an envelope in her desk with his well-known handwriting; and in a paroxysm of delight she, though blinded with tears, that come in a shower to refresh her jaded heart, pours kiss upon kiss on the paper because his hand touched it.

"Why, what is this, how dare he?" she cries, indignation scorching up the fount of her tears, as she reads "Esme Dormar." His mother has conquered, and made him disown me—I who am his wife; but they little know that Esme Dormar can give back blow for blow. He may yet crave pardon from me, and be refused. Insult upon insult—money—as if these miserable notes can solace my outraged heart; I, who a few moments ago, would have humbled myself at his feet and begged the boon of one look of love, one tender word, but now I would not sue to him—no, not if my very life depended upon my doing so. He has, by his wanton insult to me while defenceless and without a friend, stirred up my pride and made me brave. No more tears, Esme; no, keep them for a better man than a Croyland."

On the floor where it has fluttered lies a slip of paper written upon.

Swiftly she picks it up and reads with flashing eyes, thinking it might be another insult, and her lip curls scornfully as she reads the motto, "By constancy and virtue."

"Constancy! Where is it, either in mother or son?" she asks herself, derisively. "She persecuted me from the very first, and he deserts me like a craven in the hour of my need, when tempted beyond my strength I took the Croyland diamonds. Neither of them lacking constancy can possess virtue," she continues, her soul aflame with wrath. "I may be a thief in their eyes, but I stand on equal ground with them, for I was sorely tempted and tried, and being only human, fell, while they tried to crush me under their heel. Is this the nobility of a patrician family? If so, then it was an evil hour in which I allied myself to it."

Hers is a nature, once aroused, not easily quelled by misfortune, for her pride is such that it would seek to array itself in arms against the whole world.

As she paces the room like a caged lioness, what passionate memories grasp her heart!

"Coward!" she almost hisses, "to run away from me at the first breath of suspicion, and mock me with his false motto, but the hour of my triumph may yet come, when, like another Shylock, I will exact my bond and claim retribution on mother first, son afterwards."

Each time she sees the notes her wrath is kindled afresh, and it is only when the thought flashes across her mind, like an inspiration, that she might use them to good purpose, that she says exultingly, and without a trace of anger in her tones,—

"Yes, yes, that will be grand. I can buy back the diamond bracelet from Oscar, restore the jewels intact, and then, when my husband seeks a reconciliation, treat his overtures with contempt. That will be a revenge fitting for the insult he has put upon me. I was contrite, ready to acknowledge my fault, but his words, Esme Dormar, have turned my heart to adamant, and hardened my face against him and his mother."

Without counting the notes she hurriedly placed them in her pocket, and, leaving the room in disorder, she was driven to the railway station.

"My father will protect me against the Croylands," she murmurs proudly, as the train speeds on its way. "I neglected him in my prosperity, but he will forgive me, I know, now that black, bitter adversary threatens to crush me."

A glad little cry escapes her as she sees the cottage where she expects to find a haven, loving arms to welcome her, and a loving heart on which to rest her weary head.

"It is humble," she thinks, "but neither envy, hatred, or malice find a dwelling in it."

I wish now I had never been tempted to leave its walls to climb the dizzy heights of ambition, from which I have fallen in a night so low that even my husband forgets I am his wife, and styles me by my maiden name. I could have forgiven him anything but that."

The evening is very still, the white-stemmed silver-leaved birch-trees scarcely move a twig; only a ripple on the broad river, and the splash of its mimic waves tell that the wind has not quite gone to sleep with the sun, which has left the opposite sky full of soft rose tints that spread till they melt in the yellow grey in the gloaming.

It is a cosy, homely cottage down in a hollow, with woodbine and honeysuckle trailing over its rustic porch, all blossom and fragrance.

A look of disappointment comes into her face as she fails to find the old sea captain in his favourite seat in the garden, and her heart sinks with the presentiment that after all she is too late, and death has snatched away the only friend she could lean upon for comfort and support.

"You here, Oscar Viehi! Have you not done harm enough without coming here to inflict pain upon my poor old father?" she exclaims, indignantly, as he comes forward to meet her.

"Do not be too hard upon a poor unfortunate fellow like me," he says, deprecatingly.

"Unfortunate—yes, not only to yourself, but to others. Stay here; I wish to speak to you again after I have seen my father."

"He is—"

"Not dead!" she cries, seizing his arm nervously, all colour forsaking her face.

"No, Esme, only gone to sea again; that is all."

As the tide of joy rushes over her heart once more she asks,—

"What brings you down here, then?"

"To see you."

"To restore the bracelet, I hope; and that you have come to your better self, and can see how ignoble it is to persecute a woman."

"I wish I could say 'yes' to that," he replies, humbly.

"How much did you get for the bracelet?" she asks, withering him with a look of contempt.

"Not very much, as ill-luck made me stake it on cards, and I lost, as usual."

"Then why are you here? You have received the price of your silence, and ought to keep away from anyone bearing the name of Dornar."

This is said so passionately that the words cut him like the lash of a whip, and arouses the worst part of his nature.

"My price, perhaps, is higher than you appraise it," he says, moodily. "What if I tell you that I want more money, and must have it?"

"Must!" she cries, scornfully. "You have brought me to the verge of ruin. I cannot go much lower, Oscar Viehi."

"You are still Lady Croyland; they cannot take that away from you. Surely the title is worth more than a diamond bracelet? Shall I speak out, Esme Dornar?"

There is a veiled menace in this question that makes her wince and turn pale, and when she speaks a thread of entreaty runs through her words.

"Oscar, you would not quite ruin me, and bring my poor old father's grey hairs with sorrow and shame to the grave?"

"Well, I am desperate, and am in need of funds. Perhaps I might win back the bracelet if you were to give me more money, not as a bribe, but a loan. Come, Esme, I only want help. Give me another chance to get away from England and from temptation!"

"Which you will never resist as long as there is a card or dice, or board of green cloth in existence, and gamblers to help you to ruin and delude yourself."

"I am in no mood to listen to sermons. I

came here because you left no address in London."

"Surely you did not dare to ask Lord Croyland about me?"

"I saw him," he replies, a gleam of mischief in his eyes, as if it is a pleasure to tease her.

"You did!" she cries, an expression of compressed rage leaping into her face, causing her eyes to become black as night from the dilation of their pupils, her brow to contract, her lips to whiten, and her whole youth and beauty to become deformed.

Even he recoils before this spectacle, and hastens to explain, saying,—

"You wrong me by your suspicions, Esme. I thought to find you in the garden, but your husband was there, and tried to reach me. I escaped without a word passing between us. There, that is the solemn truth!"

Such a sigh of intense relief escapes her, now that a load of fear has been lifted from off her heart, that she willingly places half the notes in his hand, which is stretched out so greedily to receive them.

"You will not regret your kindness," he says, tremulously, eager to get away to try his luck once more, and to retrieve his fortunes.

"Good-bye. If I win where shall I send the bracelet?"

"Bring it to me here," she says, a little wearily, for she has no confidence in him.

"All right. I will know my fate to-night."

"Will you write me just one line as to the result?" she asks, anxiously.

"Yes, and now I must be off. Your secret is safe with me."

"Yes, as long as I can bribe you with money or jewels; but not one more diamond will you wrest from me. My one earnest purpose shall be to regain that bracelet; but how is it to be accomplished with such a man as you to deal with?" she thinks, bitterly, as she watches him pass up the Glen.

The answer came—only two words,—

"Lost.—OSCAR."

CHAPTER XI.

It is September in the Highlands, and the sun is up toiling from east to west, his rays falling fresh and cool upon the long sweeps of grass and upon the gentler swaying foliage of the trees on which the sparrows are keeping house so busily.

Nature is lavish of her jewels this morning; she is wearing them all apparently, and amongst the grass they lie thickly scattered sparkling and gleaming in the sunshine.

Across the railway, on the hillside where the sheep are breakfasting, up to the grand old castellated mansion, on every shrub and bush and blade of grass she has hung her diamonds.

Esme has found a peaceful refuge in these Highland wilds as companion to the Countess of Douglas.

"If only he would not press his attentions upon me I could feel almost happy in this delightful haven of rest," she soliloquises, as she stands by a fountain that throws its spray up into the golden sunlight.

"Good morning, Miss Spartelli," says a deep, manly voice, that causes her to start, but not with pleasure, as she turns, and replies, coldly,—

"Good morning, my lord," and is passing on when he says,—

"Do not run away. Am I such an ogre as to frighten you?"

"Indeed, no; but I think the Countess would object to my holding a *tit-a-tit* in the early morning with you."

"Why should she? What harm can there be in my stopping to speak to the fairest flower in all Deeside?"

"But remember I am only a dependent of the house of Douglas. Rumour speaks of your engagement to Lady Margaret, and I have no wish to be found here at such a time alone with you; but pardon my plain-speak-

ing, my lord, I have a duty to perform to my self."

"Rumour is not always reliable, fair lady," he returns, banteringly. "I am as free as air except for a pair of dark, witching eyes that have stolen into my heart," looking at her with a world of passion in his honest grey eyes.

"Eyes may be innocent of any such intention," she replies, frigidly. "Hearts are too susceptible, and need curbing."

"Ah! but supposing love takes the bit in its mouth and runs away with one's heart, what then?"

"I cannot stay to discuss such silly nonsense, my lord, as I am wanted indoors. Life is too real to be frittered away in soft, unmeaning speeches that amuse some, but give deep pain to others."

"Nay, I would rather suffer anything than inflict pain upon you," he says, earnestly, too much so to afford her satisfaction, lest in pressing his unwelcome suit too ardently and openly he should draw the attention of the Countess to her.

She did not care to hear any more of his rhapsodies, but hastened away, running up the broad terrace steps with a grace all her own.

"What a lovely creature, but how cold and pulseless, just like a statue! Oh! for the power of thawing her marble heart, and waking her into glowing love, warm and palpitating like Pygmalion did his Galatea!" he murmurs, as his eyes follow her every movement with rapt admiration.

He little dreams how she has responded to the voice of love with quickened pulse, beaming eyes, and throbbing heart—a very Hebe and not marble, for nature had intended one so lovely to be the delight of the heart of man, and in Warren Croyland she had found a fitting mate.

"Why will he persist in pestering me with words of love?" she pants; "I who gave my heart in exchange for a stone, that has crushed all love out of it, and made a wreck of my life, until now all I long for is rest and seclusion."

There is a piteous, hunted look in her dusky eyes that would have made Warren weep tears of anguish to see, as he vainly strives to forget that he has a wife—a woman whom he still loves madly, and with all the passion of a first love.

"Good morning, my dear," says the Countess, as Esme enters the morning-room, bringing in a rush of sweet-scented heather and fragrant ozone distilled from nature's inexhaustible laboratory. "Are there many letters?"

"Five only, my lady," trying to look and speak cheerfully, but failing, for she has not quite recovered from her feeling of annoyance.

The Countess of Douglas is very observant, and quickly discerns that something has happened to vex her companion, and says kindly, but statily,—

"Have you had any bad news, Miss Spartelli?"

"Oh, no, your ladyship; I have a slight headache, that is all, and thought the morning air would relieve it."

"You must rest instead of reading to me; I will excuse you," returns the Countess, as she peruses her letters, one of which is from her daughter. "Should you not get better soon you must see my physician. Perhaps our Scottish air is too strong for you."

"I cannot even give way to the slightest emotion without her noticing it," thinks Esme, bitterly, feeling her dependence keenly, as a little blush suffuses her face at the sweet-conscious feeling of approaching maternity, that she wishes to hide from the outer world as long as she can, lest she should be cast adrift upon the world as one who had strayed from the paths of virtue.

"Indeed, I am quite well," she says aloud, "and an hour's quiet will quite restore me, if you will kindly excuse me now."

"Certainly, my dear. I will attend to you," returns Lady Douglas, with a little

condescending nod that cuts Esme's proud nature to the quick, but she has learnt to suppress her emotion when on guard, and wears a smiling mask often, although tears are ready to flow from her eyes in showers.

As the Countess toys with a breakfast fit for a Sybarite, the delicious morning breeze stealing in from the hillside through the open windows, she muses,—

"What a strange girl she is! I cannot quite understand her. She is obedient, docile, and very charming, but there is such an ungirlish reticence about her past that unless I had received so flattering a recommendation from the old rector I should almost think she possessed a history."

Yes, such a one as you, born into the purple, my Lady Douglas, can never guess at, or she, poor girl, be made to reveal; for under her gentle exterior she has a will of iron, and would die rather than reveal that past about which you so idly speculate.

"I have a horror of anything secretive being near," the Countess murmurs, with a shudder. "One is never safe. I trust she will not turn out to be deceiving me and the kind old rector. I never pardon deceit, no, not even in my own child."

A hard expression steals into her still comely face, as if no punishment would be too severe for such an offence, forgetting that temptation assails the poor and friendless, while it beats in vain against the rocky foundation on which the wealthy rest.

"Deceit has worked mischief enough in the family of my dearest friend, Lady Croyland, whose hopes of a happy old age are entirely shattered by the uncharitable conduct of that silly boy of hers. My Margaret has had a fortunate escape. He might have broken her heart by taking up with some adventuress after marriage. His miserable wife has not even the consolation of filling the position she inveigled him into conferring upon her."

Had she only have known a little of the truth Esme would not have remained under her roof one single hour.

The world, at least her portion of it, credited the Countess with the possession of that charity which covereth a multitude of sins, her aims were so liberal, her smiles so beneficent; but under all this there is the stern Puritan, "ready to hang a cat on Monday for killing a mouse on Sunday." Such a character was not likely to look leniently on any offence against society, especially of her own sex.

As poor Esme sits up in her pretty room so simple, yet so tastefully in its surroundings, where everything speaks of virgin purity, with its delicate white coverings to chairs, ottomans, cushions, &c., her mind takes a retrospective leap, and looks back over the gulf of the past where so many hopes and aspirations lay buried never to rise again.

"Fool that I was to hazard my all upon that homet!" she thinks, angrily. "He imbued me with the same reckless spirit, and I gave him my last bank-note in the vain hope that he would wrest back the missing Croyland diamonds. He beggared me, and made me the dependent I now am—a lady of title, the equal of the woman I now serve so humbly. Why cannot I be brave enough to dry quite with the Croylands by making the jewels serve my necessities? It would be a splendid revenge, and I could in other lands forget that there is such a land as England."

Her hand rests on the packet of diamonds, when there flashed across her a consciousness of her sweet secret, that soon another would come to share her sorrow, or be crushed under the weight of the world's censure.

"No, lay there until the day of restitution," she cries, so passionately that her words sound like a hiss; "they shall never brand a child of mine with its mother's theft, which I consider untrue, for as Warren's wife I had, and still have, every right to the jewels. It pleases me to think that she, his haughty mother, dare not accuse me openly; what she must suffer in keeping silent she alone

knows. Warren is not with her, and in her old age she is without one consolation, one home link. She had no pity on me, but yet when I think of her loneliness I am almost tempted to pray for her."

Presently the old temptation comes over her to put on the diamonds, for which she has risked so much, even to the severance of love that once had been so dear to her, so satisfying.

"Yes, they become me," she cries, with a gleam of triumph in her eyes. "I have them, and will never give them up until he leads me to Croylands, and I become undisputed mistress there. I have suffered through them, and they must bring me a fitting recompense."

How they flash and sparkle, speaking, as it were, with tongues of fire, these gems conceived in nature's laboratory, where they had lain for countless ages!

"Glorious things, my dream of power!" she exclaims, apostrophising them. "What magic there is in your touch, what wealth! You are fit companions for monarchs, and yet you rest contentedly on my bosom, although I am only a companion, earning my daily bread by anguish and humiliation."

So absorbed is she that she does not hear a gentle tap at the door, or notice that Rivers, the maid, has entered, and is staring at Esme in amazement.

All at once she sees the woman's face in the glass, and notices how her eyes are fixed upon the gems.

In a moment she snatches up a plaid and covers her shoulders and bust, shutting out the tell-tale diamonds.

"Don't hide them, miss, they are worth looking at," says Rivers animatedly; "why, my lady, the Countess has nothing to equal them."

"Pshaw!" laughs Esme, in a forced manner, "they are only paste, Rivers, sent me from Paris by a friend, and I was amusing myself by trying their effect."

"I never saw paste flash as those, Miss Spartelli," says the canny Scotch woman. "I have seen and handled too many in my day to be easily deceived. Will you permit me to look at them?"

"They are not worth a thought, Rivers," says Esme, testily, "I am ashamed of being discovered masquerading in rubbish. "Does her ladyship want me?"

"No, I simply came to ask what you would like for lunch, or if you are well enough to join my lady in the dining-room?"

"I will come directly; but stay, Rivers, you will not mention my foolish vanity to her ladyship, will you?"

"I am not in the habit of carrying tales, miss," she returns somewhat sourly; "certain little matters that come to my notice I keep to myself. Speech is silver, but silence is golden"—this significantly, that brings the blood up into the girl's conscious face, for she feels that Rivers has penetrated her secret, which as the months pass bring fresh cares and anxieties.

CHAPTER XII.

"Why will you persist in evading me?" asks Lord MacIvor, taking Esme's hand and holding it in a firm, but gentle, grip, one evening in the twilight, when the grey mists are gathering on the heather-covered hills. "What can I say or do to convince you how dear you are to me?"

"I only wish you would cease to even think of me," she says, softly, for being only a woman she can feel for his hopeless pursuit of her. "I have no heart, it is dead—buried in the past."

"But I could warm it back into life, sweet Esme; better that yours should revive than mine be killed too. I only ask to be permitted to speak to you of my love; I can wait patiently for its fruition."

"Oh, no! you must not, indeed, you must not. I tell you plainly, truthfully, that no man living has the power to awaken my heart; it is satisfied, and only wants rest and peace."

"But that means stagnation. You were never intended to lead such a dull anchorite's life; as my wife you would assume the position that your beauty entitles you to—you would govern and command instead of serving in the ranks, and make the sweetest chateleine in all bonny Scotland."

"But you forget your family, and what is due to them."

"In what way?" he asks, impatiently.

She is silent for some moments, thinking how she could prove to him by bitter experience that a *mesalliance* is visited upon the defenceless head of the ambitious wife, who, all too soon, learns that a coronet may be stuffed with thorns.

"It is idle to argue with you, my lord, because passion blinds you," she says, calmly. "I, standing outside your charmed circle, can see the danger any woman would incur by marrying above her in station."

"Granted, for the sake of argument," he cries, "but I deny that my family are superior to you. There is a nobility of beauty and grace that few can aspire to; you would confer an honour upon me by becoming my wife. Oh! Esme, why will you not see how deep, how true my love is for you, and give up your opposition? I have title, wealth, and lay all at your feet."

"Would that Warren were here to listen to these impassioned words," she thinks, with a pensive smile, "then the despised Esme Dormar would assume an importance in his eyes that she now lacks."

Her silence seems to give her noble wooer some hope, for he raises her hand to his lips in a sudden transport of hope and joy, which ceases her pain, knowing well that he might as well sigh for the moon as for her.

"My lord, it grieves me to say no so many times," she falters, "but it can never be anything else but that. Come to think of me; there are others fairer than I am with hearts that have not been scared and blighted."

"I see it all," he says, bitterly, "you have loved and been cruelly treated. Cast such a past of sorrow behind you and live for a happy future, with the bright sun of love to chase away every cloud and to make you once more a happy being, such as I would give half my fortune to see."

"Would that I dared give you hope," she sighs, "for, indeed, your devotion should not go unrequited; but I cannot say yes, for your sake as much as my own."

Looking into her face he sees there a tenderness that shows him she has a heart, and that what he thought marble is real flesh and blood, pulsating with human emotions that do credit to her woman's nature.

"I will still persevere," he thinks; "already she begins to thaw, and I may yet win her love, which to me would be the greatest of earthly treasures."

"My paradise is still open to me, and I can look through the gates at my Eve if I cannot enter," he says, enigmatically.

But she understood his meaning, and shivers when she thinks how hopeless his every effort will be to win her from her allegiance as Warren Croyland's wife.

"I cannot take away hope from your heart; indeed, it would be cruel to do so," she says, sadly. "Let me be a sister to you; I have no brother or protector, and one day may need both."

Her little hand is held out frankly, and a sweet smile of entreaty hovers around her pretty mouth as she says this.

Loving her as he does, all too well for his own peace of mind, he is glad of any compromise that still keeps him within the pale of her life, and says, as he clasps the white fragile thing in his,—

"Yes, Esme, I will be all that, and more to you both, now and evermore."

Once more he raises the hand he holds to his lips, and then suffers her to depart, and watches her with yearning, longing eyes of love as she floats away into the misty shadows and is lost to his sight.

"I have gained something," he murmurs. "The rest will come when the secret sorrow that, like a cancer, is eating away her very life is removed. Then I can claim her for wife; but, oh! it is weary waiting, and yet I have not the courage to pluck out love's barbed arrow and let her go out of my life."

While Lord Macfivor was urging his suit with passionate vehemence, that if Esme had been free must have gained him her hand, the Countess had summoned Rivers to a special consultation about the so-called Miss Spartelli.

"What I ask you is your opinion," observes her ladyship, authoritatively. "I will be answered!"

"I—I cannot say, my lady," stammers Rivers, getting red in the face; the question was so pointed, and she was too honest to speak of her suspicion as if it were a certainty.

"You are keeping something back, Rivers. Remember the scandal it would create in my household if my idea is right! All false sentiment should be put aside in so serious a matter."

"But, my lady, what a dreadful accusation it would be to make against her should she be innocent! Why not question her, my lady? Surely she did not enter your service without referring you to some responsible person or persons?"

"Certainly not; it is not my custom to employ anybody at haphazard. Her references were undeniably good, but still her appearance is such as to warrant my gravest suspicion. If she has dared to enter my household, which has long been a pattern to the county, not a member of it having once transgressed against the rules of propriety, I shall visit her offence with instant expulsion; she shall not remain to contaminate others!"

Poor Esme little dreams of how she is being discussed, or she would never have re-entered the home of her noble patroness, but have escaped from an ordeal to which the torture of the rack would prove mere child's play.

"There, you can go," says her mistress, in a tone of displeasure. "I thought you could have thrown some light upon the affair, as you see so much of Miss Spartelli."

"I wish I could warn her, poor thing!" thinks the good-natured lady's maid, "for somehow I have got to like her very much; but it is a delicate matter, and I wouldn't wound her feelings for the world."

"I will have this out at once," says the Countess to herself, in a tone of determination. "I will not sleep until I either confirm her innocence or guilt."

Of unswerving purpose when once her mind was made up, she goes straight to Esme's room, and receiving no answer to her knock, enters.

The fire is burning cheerily in the grate, and casting lurid shadows right and left, as if playing at hide-and-seek with the growing darkness.

"Dear me, what is that gleaming so yonder?" she asks herself, going up to Esme's open desk, in which lay the Croyland diamonds flashing like meteors in the fitful light.

"What diamonds! Surely they cannot be mine? She would not dare to rob me. I must see into this at once, and ring for lights."

Her hand is on the bell when Esme enters, unsuspecting of the sharp sword which, like that of Damocles, hangs over her head by a single thread.

"The diamonds, how foolish of me," she thinks, as she sees them in Lady Douglas's hands.

"Miss Spartelli, how did you come by these?" demands the Countess, in a tone that arouses Esme's pride.

"That is my business," she replies, haughtily assuming the position of Lady Croylands for the moment, and dropping the dependent; "they are mine."

"Indeed! people in your station of life do

not have priceless jewels," she sneers by way of retort.

"They are my property, and I insist upon your putting them back at once, Lady Douglas," says Esme, with austerity.

"When I have examined them and satisfied myself that they are not mine I will; remember, you are addressing your mistress."

"I shall not permit such an insult, Lady Douglas; perhaps some day you will learn who and what I am. My very position in your household ought to be my chief protection against such an outrage as this!" cries Esme, hotly.

And before the astonished Countess is aware of her intention she snatches the diamonds out of her hand, and after placing them in the desk shuts and locks it, with startling energy.

"Now, Lady Douglas, before you dare to impute dishonesty to me go and examine your jewel-case; I think you will find it all right."

The Countess stands literally dazed at the girl's audacity, and does not know what to do or say.

"Shall I ring for your maid to bring it here?" asks Esme, in a tone of cutting irony that rouses her ladyship into life once more.

"No, Miss Spartelli, if I have wronged you I will apologise, but there is another matter that must be cleared up."

In a few brief words she tells Esme of her suspicions, and demands a prompt denial or admission.

"I refuse to answer what I consider an impertinent question, Lady Douglas; you have already outraged my feelings sufficiently, and I decline to submit to any further insult to-night."

"You then must thoroughly understand that your insolence and wilful obstinacy bring about your own dismissal; I will send you your cheque to-morrow morning—you leave without a character."

"Spiteful, venomous woman," mutters Esme, as the Countess sweeps out of the room, "you think to have your revenge because I would not submit tamely to insults, but I am not so easily cast down, and will find friends and home yet."

Little sleep visited the poor girl's eyes that night, for she lay awake thinking of the past, and of all the evil that had befallen her since she touched the diamonds.

"Am I to be like the fabled wandering Jew, bringing trouble and misery in my track, while I myself find no rest or shelter?" she asks herself, drearily, just as the first streak of dawn enters her chamber.

"Good-bye, Rivers, and thank you for many kindnesses," says Esme, gratefully, as she stands at the door.

"Won't you wait for the carriage to take you to the station? It is ordered."

"No, I prefer to walk—my luggage can be sent there."

As she passes through the gates Lady Margaret Douglas drives through, and catching sight of Esme's face says with a start,—

"Why, that is Lady Croyland—what brought her to Deeside?"

When her mother comes to welcome her home she says,—

"Who was that lady I saw just pass out?"

"My companion, whom I have dismissed in disgrace."

"Then, mother, you have sent away not a companion, but Lady Croyland, Warren's wife!"

(To be continued.)

A BOAT'S bow is naively perfect; complete without an effort. The man who makes it knows not that he is making anything beautiful, as he bends its planks into those mysterious curves. It grows under his hands into the image of a seashell. He leaves it when all is done without a boast. It is simple work, but it will keep out water, and every plank, thenceforward, is a fate, and has men's lives wreathed in the knots of it.

THE JUGGLERS OF INDIA.

The one class who interested me particularly in India were the jugglers. I have always had a fancy for prying into the secrets of prestidigitation, and I lost no opportunity of seeing these sleight-of-hand gentry at their tricks, and found occasion to witness many of their performances in different parts of India.

My investigations lead me to state positively that the most remarkable stories told about them are fictions, based upon the flimsiest foundation of fact.

The great majority of people like to be deceived in such matters, and will shut their eyes to palpable evidence of fraud, while travellers who eagerly seize upon every chance to pad their narratives with sensation points, naturally throw a veil of mystery around the tricks of the Indian jugglers.

Let us take, for instance, the two performances that have been most frequently and most marvellously written up—that is to say, the mysterious basket and the mango-growing tricks.

I have seen both of them over and over again, and have found the same easily-detected frauds to exist in every case.

The baskets are bell-shaped and have a false bottom, between which and the exterior wall of the basket there is ample room for a very small child to stow itself away.

The spectators are not allowed to touch, or even to come very near to the basket, and in a casual glance at the interior one is not apt to detect the false bottom.

The basket is placed over the child, who squats upon the hard ground, and after sufficient time has elapsed for the youngster to crawl into its place of concealment, the juggler horrifies his audience by passing his sword through the basket, and then upon upsetting it, shows that the child has disappeared.

Meanwhile, a duplicate child that closely resembles the first one enters upon the scene from the background, and the wonderful trick is completed.

The famous mango-growing trick is even sillier than this. You have, of course, read how a man of mysterious arts plants a mango seed in a flowerpot, and then makes a dwarfed fruit-bearing tree spring up from that seed. The facts of the case are simply these:

The seed is planted, and the pot is then placed under a sort of tent, whose voluminous folds must not be touched by any but the juggler. The latter then waters the earth in the pot, and does a lot of manipulating while his hands are concealed in the tent.

Meanwhile, a fellow-juggler is performing a series of other tricks to amuse and distract the attention of spectators. When juggler number one has had time to change the pot for another that is hidden in the folds of the tent, he opens one side of the canvas a little, and the second pot can be seen with a half-grown mango tree in it.

After another interlude of the same sort, the tent/door is again opened, and a third pot is disclosed which contains a little tree bearing a mango. The whole thing is such a weak attempt at deception that a person, after studying it once or twice, can only wonder if anyone has really been deceived by it.

I always enjoyed the palming performances of the clever jugglers, for their skill and rapidity of action were something extraordinary; but their materialising tricks were such palpable absurdities that there was actually no fun in detecting them.

GREAT THOUGHTS.—For our own sakes and for our children's we cannot afford to lose a single great thought, or good deed, or beautiful conception of those who have gone before us. Ruskin says: "Be assured that all the best things and treasures of this world are not to be produced by each generation for itself, but we are all intended, not to carve our work in snow that will melt, but each and all of us to be rolling a great, white, gathering snowball, higher and higher, larger and larger, along the Alps of human power."

SPINNING ON THE PORCH.

I WATCHED a maiden sitting
On the porch, one autumn day,
Her work was neither knitting,
Nor the fragile French crochet :
But simple, homely spinning—
Such as now we hardly know—
And her smile was very winning,
Just a score of years ago.

The sinking sun was flashing
Upon her chestnut hair ;
The spindle's rhythmic clashing
Was music in the air.
The flowers around were blooming,
And, fairest in the place,
Were roses, unassuming,
That nestled in her face.

On a porch where fragrant brier
And roses bloom, I see
A maiden fair ; and by her
A youth who seems to be
Enraptured, as another—
Whose heart I ought to know—
Was with the maiden's mother,
A score of years ago.

The maid is simply stitching,
But her needle still can cast
A spell no less bewitching
Than the spindle of the past.
Its thread is deftly winding
In and out, at love's behest ;
Its web is just as binding ;
But I like the spindle best !

E. L.

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLIE AT HOME.

Two months have passed away since Elsie left Maltby Grange with Charlie Birch, and during that time she has been quite contented, and almost happy.

Charlie and she got on together admirably ; they never jarred and never wearied each other, while life at Monkshill was as smooth and almost as unruffled as a tideless river.

Mrs. Ridgeway, the "dragon" of whom Miss Birch had spoken, was a soft-voiced, gentle-mannered old lady, who wore her grey curls close to the side of her face, who always dressed well, and who reminded one of nothing so much as of a sleek, well-fed good-natured cat.

Like a cat, she was fond of getting close to the fire, and here she would sit hour after hour, reading the "Devonshire Worthies," or works of a similar class, and of which she never seemed to tire.

She made a deep impression upon Elsie, to begin with, by her intimate acquaintance with the Spanish Armada, which she could describe quite vividly, as though she had been present with Drake and the host of heroes who in that day saved their country and broke the power of Spain.

Life in this large country house was like a new world to Elsie, who had, it will be remembered, spent most of her time at school.

Charlie Birch might not be really more wealthy than Mrs. Maltby, but Monkshill was larger, and was managed on a more liberal scale than Maltby Grange.

But then the younger lady had not so many outside expenses as those which lightened the purse of the would-be regenerator of her species ; and as Charlie lived upon her own estate, which included several very good farms, she was naturally enough regarded as an heiress to a considerable property.

November, however, is not the month in which to see Devonshire in its glory.

The glowing tints of autumn have departed,

the last leaves have been shaken from the trees and have been carried eddying along, singly and in masses, by the cruel wind, until they have been trodden down into the mire and mud which lies several inches deep, even on the turnpike road.

What the other roads are like, and what are the condition of the lanes, even on so well-kept an estate as Monkshill, Elsie has already experienced.

The first time she attempted to make her way to the brook at the bottom of the hill, that is now swollen to the size of a river, she lost her goshes ; the next time she nearly lost her boots, and having stuck in the mud, and being unable to extricate herself, she was obliged to be lifted out, an experience which had the effect of making her more careful of the way she took in future.

For the soil in the neighbourhood of Monkshill is a dark red, heavy clay, and the rain which falls pretty frequently in this locality, and has now been coming down steadily for the last week, has made out-of-door amusement or exercise impossible.

"Oh, dear me ! I wish something would happen !" yawned Charlie Birch, as she extended her arms and stretched her limbs wearily.

"My dear, something is happening ; the rain is coming down as though it never means to stop," said Mrs. Ridgeway scoldingly.

"Don't I know that !" groaned Charlie ; "haven't I been shut up in this house six mortal days, waiting for the rain to cease, and isn't it enough to daze one's brain to look out on that gloomy prospect from morning till night ? Augh ! I don't think I can endure it any longer."

Her companions looked in the direction indicated, and saw, what they likewise were weary of seeing—a wide expanse stretching miles away, of undulating country, scarcely distinguishable now by reason of the mist of falling rain hanging over it.

"I'll tell you what it is, Elsie !" suddenly exclaimed Charlie, "we'll go for a walk—we'll get ourselves well soaked with rain and covered with mud. The change will give us an appetite for luncheon, if it does nothing more."

"I am willing enough for the walk," replied Elsie, with a smile ; "but I'll wear my mackintosh if you don't object. I am not fond of getting wet, as I am pretty sure to catch a cold if I do."

"Very well, keep out the rain if you can, for influenza does not add to one's attractions, and it isn't pleasant to look a guy even if there isn't anybody to see you," replied Charlie.

"Where do you propose to go ?" asked Elsie, who had, in truth, no inclination for making an intimate acquaintance with the mud and the rain.

"We'll walk for a mile or two on the turnpike road and then come back again," said Miss Birch. "We have no near neighbours upon whom I should care to call."

"My dear, have you forgotten that it is market day in Tiverton, and that there will be a great many people on the main road ?" asked Mrs. Ridgeway, severely ; "it is impossible for you and Miss Heath to go walking there, and on such a day as this, too !"

"Market-day !" repeated Charlie, in a delighted tone, "I had forgotten it quite ; we will drive into Tiverton, and we'll go through the market and do some shopping, and have luncheon at one of the hotels. It will be a break in the monotony of our lives, won't it, Elsie ?"

"Yes, I should like it very much," responded our heroine, brightly.

"And I shall be laid up with rheumatism for a fortnight if I go out this weather," groaned Mrs. Ridgeway, pathetically.

"We don't want you to go with us," replied Charlie, coolly ; "I'll have my village car out and drive Miss Heath and myself. Chowan, the groom, can go too ; we shall be all right."

"But, my dear, it won't be the correct thing

for you two young ladies to go to an hotel to luncheon !" objected Mrs. Ridgeway, feebly.

"It will be very much worse for us to go without luncheon," retorted Charlie, promptly. And as a servant appeared at that moment she gave her orders, and then the two girls went off to dress for their drive.

"Dear me, I suppose I ought to go with them," groaned the poor old lady. "But it is such dreadful weather, and I am such a sufferer."

She pondered thus for a little while, then heroically determined to make a martyr of herself, and sought Charlie to say she would go with them, only they must have a closed carriage.

But Miss Birch declined to make any change in her arrangements—she and Miss Heath could take good care of themselves, she asserted.

Then she pulled on her driving gloves, and declared herself to be ready.

The village car was a beautiful little carriage of polished oak ; and the handsome, spirited pony seemed to be quite conscious that his harness was new, and that his mistress, her companion, and himself were each of them worthy objects of admiration.

Chowan, the old groom, looked doleful at having to turn out and sit behind his mistress on such a day, but he valued his comfortable situation too much to grumble. So Charlie drove away in good spirits, and before she had gone half-a-mile the rain ceased, and a light wind drove away some of the mist that hung over the valleys.

Monkshill is about six miles from Tiverton, and the ground can be quickly got over by a good pony, for the road, with a few steep exceptions, is all down-hill. Coming back, however, would not be such an easy matter, and Charlie remarked carelessly that they should probably have to walk part of the way.

"I could walk now," protested Elsie. "I am so glad we came out. How pleasant the air is now the rain has ceased—I quite enjoy being out !"

"Yes, it is a mistake to yield to the weather," replied Charlie ; then she added in a low tone, "by the way, I dressey I shall meet some people I know ; remember, you are my guest, on a visit to me. I don't want to leave you at home when I go anywhere."

"You are very good," responded Elsie, in the same low tone.

"No, I am not ; Mrs. Ridgeway considers that I am very selfish."

Then, a few minutes afterwards, as a young gentleman on horseback came out of a lane and joined them, Charlie checked the speed of her pony to return his bow and say, as he rode by her side,—

"Good morning, Mr. Carew ; delightful weather, isn't it ?"

"Beastly, I call it," replied the young man.

"I came from town two days ago, and I'm now going to Tiverton in the hope of meeting a face I know."

"And you have met us, bound very much on the same errand," laughed Charlie. Then, leaning back a little so that Elsie's face could be better seen, she said, "My friend, Miss Heath, Mr. Carew."

The young people bowed, and the conversation, if such it could be called, was general until they drove up to the Mitre Hotel, where the carriage from Monkshill was always put up.

Mr. Carew left his horse here also, and attached himself to the young ladies as their natural escort.

He knew Miss Birch and admired her, but he was not quite sure that the face of her companion had not a much greater attraction for him.

However, it was very pleasant to walk through the crowded streets with two of the prettiest girls he had ever seen ; and he was so conscious of his enviable position that he just nodded to certain young men whom he knew, and passed on, whereas, under other circum-

stances; he would have stopped to speak with them.

He was not long to have them all to himself like this, however.

They walked through the market, which was but poorly attended to-day, and, coming out on the principal street, they paused before an hotel, intending to cross the road when they could do so with safety.

Before they could step off the pavement a carriage pulled up close to where they stood, and, a second or two later, a tall, aristocratic-looking lady was shaking hands with Charlie, and saying to her,—

"My dear Miss Birch, I thought you were in London? I heard of you only yesterday as having been there."

"I was in London in the summer, but I have been at Monkhill for the last two months," replied Charlie, coolly.

"Dear me, and I am afraid that there was no invitation sent you for the fourteenth of next month," said Lady Trevellyn, in a tone of regret. "I am so very sorry; but you will excuse the blunder, won't you, and you will come to the ball? I will see that cards are sent you to-night."

"Thank you; you are very kind," responded Charlie, though not in quite so cordial a tone as was usual to her.

Then, glancing at Elsie, she introduced her, adding,—

"My friend, Miss Heath, is staying with me for a month or two."

"Oh! indeed. Then we shall be very glad to see Miss Heath also at our ball. I am so sorry I did not know you were at home, my dear Miss Birch, for our house-party is quite made up. We haven't a garret that isn't allotted to somebody."

Charlie laughed, and said that Lady Trevellyn could not be expected to remember everybody. Then they shook hands, and parted; but when the girls went on again they found that young Carew was no longer by their side.

"My lady has not forgiven me for refusing her cousin," remarked Charlie. "She didn't mean to invite me to the coming-of-age of her son, only that, as she met us, it would have been such a very marked omission that she hadn't the courage to make it."

"Do you intend to go to the ball?" asked Elsie, timidly.

"Yes. Why not?" was the answer. "You will go, too, won't you?"

"I don't know," said our heroine, earnestly. "I should like to do so; but I was never at a ball in my life."

"Dear me, what a world of enjoyment you have yet before you!" respond Charlie, with a sigh. "Never been to a ball, and I have been to dozens and dozens! But you can dance, can't you?"

"Oh, yes! We used to have dancing-parties every month at school, and I could dance as well as any of them," replied Elsie; "but, of course, they were all girls."

"Well, they won't be all girls this time!" laughed Charlie; "but you will get on all right. And we shall have to make up our minds what we will wear. I am almost inclined to send to London for our dresses. Why, wherever did you spring from?"

This question was not addressed to Elsie, but to a tall, fair, handsome young man, who lifted his hat, and stood in their path.

"I came from the railway-station half-an-hour ago," replied Harry Kingswood, brightly. "But I shouldn't have known you were here if I had not run against Carew just now."

The girls shook hands with him, but Elsie was so little pleased with the encounter that she was glad to answer a remark which Mr. Carew addressed to her; and as four of them could not walk abreast in the crowded streets, these last two fell behind their companions, and were well contented to follow in their footsteps.

They did some shopping, and they met a great number of acquaintances—at least, Miss Birch and Mr. Carew did so. Then they went

back to the hotel where Charlie's pony and trap and Mr. Carew's horse had been left, and all four of them had luncheon together.

It was very pleasant; and Charlie Birch was in the highest of spirits, for Elsie and Harry Kingswood took but little notice of each other, and Arthur Carew was evidently very much charmed with the young girl who had that day been introduced to him.

"You two had better ride over and have luncheon with us to-morrow," the mistress of Monkhill remarked, as she and Elsie took their seats in the car.

Then she gave her pony the rein, and he dashed off at such a pace that the lookers-on were, for the moment, alarmed.

Well, this has been better than staying at home, moping over the fire," remarked Charlie, cheerfully, as they sped along homeward. "We shall have this ball to think of; and if all goes well I shall give a large party myself after Christmas."

Elsie made no immediate reply.

She remembered that many of Charlie's proposed entertainments when she was staying at the Burlingtons had fallen through, so she did not anticipate much gaiety at Monkhill. Not that she longed for excitement; she was quite satisfied to live a quiet, uneventful life, to study and improve her mind, and to feel that she was not utterly useless to Charlie, who was so good and kind to her.

Indeed, if it were not for her presence in the house, life at Monkhill would be positively intolerable to the heiress, who was singularly destitute of near relatives or of intimate friends.

Elsie's thoughts wandered back often enough to the dear old Hermitage, and she longed so intensely to know what Lionel Denison thought of her flight, and whether he really was going to marry Miss Grey, that if she could have relied upon the silence and discretion of Mrs. Curtis she would, undoubtedly, have written to her.

But Mrs. Curtis was not trustworthy in this respect. She would be sure to tell her master she had received the letter; she would very probably show it to him, and they might both of them misunderstand her motive for writing, and might think she was anxious to be asked to come back again.

So she resolved to be silent, to wait one whole year, and at the expiration of that time, if she had heard nothing, she thought she might allow herself to write to the kind, old housekeeper.

Her thoughts had wandered off into this channel, and she was so silent that Charlie, who had been rattling on, talking of what she would do, was piqued into saying,—

"We will send out invitations to-night for a dinner-party. A good many people have come back to the neighbourhood, and it is of no use shutting ourselves up as we have been doing. By the way, Mr. Kingswood looked very well, didn't he?"

"Yes," replied Elsie, reluctantly; "but he always has seemed well when I have seen him."

Charlie made no response to this. She would have given a great deal to know if Elsie admired or wished to win Harry Kingswood, but she could not ask the question, for the gentle girl, despite her confiding frankness, had a certain dignity about her which made Miss Birch feel that any hint of her desire would seem like an impertinence.

With regard to her own feelings, she would not on any consideration, at this stage of affairs, have talked of them to her friend, though she would have been very glad for Elsie to know them, because it would have made her own conduct with regard to the gentleman so much more decided.

And yet Elsie could scarcely have been more cool towards him than she had been to-day, for she had shown no pleasure at meeting him, and had evidently been much more interested in Mr. Arthur Carew.

The drive to the market-town, and the friends she had met there, infused new spirit

into Miss Birch; and, true to her determination, she sent out that evening invitations for a good-sized dinner-party.

"A ball is not an easy thing to manage just now," she remarked to Elsie, as they were parting for the night; "but we will have one directly after Christmas, I promise you."

The latter smiled, though she could not help wondering if she should be here after Christmas.

Next morning was finer and brighter than the previous one, though the mud was still several inches deep in the roads and lanes; and the dogcart, in which Mr. Carew and Mr. Kingswood drove, was well bespattered when they alighted at Monkhill.

Charlie received them in her usual bright, friendly manner, and, as it still wanted some little time to luncheon, she suggested that they should go out into the grounds and enjoy the sunshine.

"My dear, you will catch your death of cold," protested Mrs. Ridgeway, who knew that if the girls went she must go also.

But Charlie made light of the objection, and was determined, in this case, to have her own way.

Harry Kingswood had never been here before, and it was but natural that Charlie should feel some pardonable pride in showing him over her domain.

He was conscious of this, and he tried to seem interested in all he saw; for in his way he liked Charlie, and he had had very serious thoughts of asking her to become his wife.

It would be a very good match for him; there was little doubt of his being accepted, and he would win a girl whom he admired greatly, and for whom he had a very sincere liking.

He told himself all this as he walked by her side, and yet he could not give her all his attention.

Every now and again he would turn to look at Elsie, and once he was so much annoyed at the way in which Carew bent his head and talked to her, while she seemed to listen with interest, that he himself paid no heed to what Charlie was saying; and she, surprised at his silence, looked quickly at his face, and, catching its expression, rightly read the thoughts that were passing through his mind.

The hot blood rushed to her cheek, her eyes flashed, and her bosom swelled with anger, but she smothered her indignation, though she said, abruptly,—

"We have had enough of this, let us go in to luncheon. Mr. Kingswood, will you take Mrs. Ridgeway?"

Then she joined Elsie and Mr. Carew, and walked with them back to the house.

But though she was affectionate as usual to the girl she had befriended, and though she tried hard not to blame her for the fascination which she exercised over Kingswood, she would scarcely have been human if she had not sincerely wished that those two had never met. It was,—

"The little rift within the lute,
Which by-and-by shall make the music mute."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAREWS AND THEIR GUEST.

LUNCHEON passed off pleasantly enough, and Charlie soon recovered from his brief fit of jealousy.

Elsie certainly gave her no cause for complaint; for she devoted most of her attention to Mr. Carew, and was just amiable and civil to Mr. Kingswood, as to one whom she had met before to-day, but in whom she felt no interest.

Charlie also, when she came to think the matter over, felt that she had been in danger of showing her own feelings too openly.

She reflected that Elsie had told her that Mr. Kingswood knew some of the friends from whom she was hiding herself, and she began to hope that the young man's interest in the pretty girl was due to a suspicion as to

her identity with one of whom he must have previously heard.

"That would account for the way in which his eyes follow her when she is unconscious of his observation," mused Charlie; "but it isn't pleasant, for all that. I wonder how long he is going to stay in this neighbourhood."

With a view of ascertaining the length of his proposed stay she addressed Kingswood's host, and asked,—

"Are your aunt and sister with you at the Nest, Mr. Carew?"

"Yes, they are coming over to see you to-morrow," replied the young man. "Lily is looking forward to some hunting."

Then turning to Elsie he asked,—

"Do you hunt, Miss Heath?"

"Oh, no!" was the prompt reply.

"But you ride?" persisted the young man.

"Yes, I used to ride with my companions at school, and my riding-master sometimes used to guide me; but I should be afraid to hunt."

"Miss Heath has not long been emancipated from the schoolroom, and therefore her experience of life is limited," observed Miss Heath. "I don't think I shall hunt myself this winter; but we may ride to the meet and see the start. Your sister is coming over to-morrow, you say?"

Mr. Carew replied in the affirmative.

"Then I will be at home," was the next remark, followed immediately by the question, "You are all going to the ball at Trevelyan Court next month, aren't you?"

"Yes, Lily and my aunt are going, so, I think, am I; but Kingswood won't be here."

"Don't be too sure of that!" remarked the latter, with a laugh. "I leave you next week, it is true; but I am invited to stay with the Trevelyan's next month for the coming-off of the youngster. He is a nice young fellow. Have you seen him, Miss Heath?"

Elsie said "No," but added nothing more.

Instinct warned her that for many reasons it was desirable to say as little as possible to Mr. Kingswood.

She had observed the quick, suspicious glance he gave her when Charlie spoke of her as a recently emancipated schoolgirl, and she began to wonder whether he knew more about her than she had hitherto surmised.

If she could have talked with him freely she would have liked to ask him about Lionel Denison and Miss Grey; but this, for fear of betraying herself, she dared not do; while something in Harry Kingswood's tone and manner reminded her of his words in the hall at Maltby Grange, when he kissed her hand, and asked if he might write to her.

"I must and I will avoid anything of that kind with him in future," she thought, resolutely.

And by way of emphasising her determination she, quite unconsciously, showed so much interest in young Carew that it is scarcely wonderful that he should consider himself greatly encouraged thereby.

She had no thought of encouraging him. If she had tried to analyse her feelings she would have decided that she liked him very much, and that in time she might care for him as though he had been her brother.

But any warmer sentiment was impossible. She never entertained the thought that it could be otherwise. Her life would be solitary and single. Of this she was quite convinced—a sad prospect for a girl who was not yet eighteen.

The last few months had made a great change in Elsie—a change of which she was altogether unconscious.

On that day when Edith Grey met her, and poisoned with her evil tongue the placid contentment of her life, Elsie was a very lovely girl; but she was unformed, and the air of the schoolroom still seemed to cling to her.

The necessity of thinking and acting for herself, of taking her own part, with dignity and courage, in the battle of life, had brushed away the crudeness and awkwardness that,

under less exciting conditions, would have clung longer to her, while the people with whom she had found herself, though peculiar enough in their way, had all been of a much better class than poor Mrs. Curtis, with whom, at the Hermitage, she was compelled to spend much of her time.

Thus it was that the awkwardness of extreme youth had left her; and though she was naturally shy and timid, she was, to all outward appearances, perfectly self-possessed, though perhaps a little reserved.

This reserve, indeed, was to Arthur Carew one of her greatest charms, particularly as it was evinced towards Kingswood rather than against himself.

The young men went away at last, and Charlie would probably have shut herself up in her own room for a time to calm down and think matters over, if the invitations from Trevelyan Court had not at the moment opportunely arrived.

"Now," said Charlie, holding the card in her hand, "we must decide the momentous question—what are we to wear? I should like to create a sensation at this ball if it were possible."

"But is it possible?" asked Elsie, timidly. "Wouldn't it be better to get just what you know will suit you? I always think it a great pity for a girl who is worth looking at to wear a dress that attracts attention to itself rather than to herself."

"Wise little woman, you are right," assented Charlie.

Then they began to discuss style and material and colour—subjects much more interesting to them at the moment than they would be to us.

But Charlie quite recovered her good humour by these means, so the dresses were decided upon; an order for them was sent to London, and there was ample matter for conversation for the rest of the evening—Charlie busy with speculation as to whom they would meet at Trevelyan Court, and Mrs. Ridgeway ready to give the genealogy and a few personal particulars, not only of the Trevelyan's and Carew's, but of their more or less immediate neighbours.

As for Elsie, she listened and sighed, and wondered what Mrs. Ridgeway would say if she ever discovered that she herself had no pedigree—that she did not even know the name of her own father—that she was "nobody's" child.

The next morning was fine again; indeed, the weather had considerably improved, and though the roads were a disgrace to any civilised country, it was useless to hope for anything but soft, deep, clayey mud until a frost set in and hardened the ground.

Charlie and Elsie went for a drive, and enjoyed it thoroughly, for the wintry landscape had a fascination for the girls, and the uninterrupted alternation of hill and dale was inexpressibly charming, bathed as the undulating country was by the bright rays of the November sun.

Soon after luncheon, which was rather late at Monkshill, Mrs. Thorn and Miss Carew called, and Elsie saw, by the manner in which Charlie and these ladies met, that a considerable degree of intimacy existed between them.

She did not learn then, of course, but it came to her knowledge later on that strong hopes had been entertained by the gentleman's family that a union would one day take place between Arthur Carew and Charlotte Birch.

What probability there was of such an event the most careless looker-on could easily decide.

When one of the principals in such a proposed union is eager for it there is some chance of its being one day *un fait accompli*; but when, as in the present instance, neither of them had the least inclination that way, there was not much probability of Mrs. Thorn's hopes being realised.

"Strangely enough, though Elsie was, to use Charlie's expression, "as sweet as summer

cherries" to these two ladies, they treated her with marked coldness, and evidently did not approve of her presence here.

And undoubtedly, from their point of view, their verdict was a reasonable and a just one.

They had been well pleased to have Mr. Kingswood as a guest for a week or ten days, though they declared it was too bad of Arthur to have invited him and then to have forgotten all about it; but things would have gone very smoothly if Mrs. Thorn is to be credited, if that very singular-looking girl had not been on a visit to Monkshill.

Mrs. Thorn called her "singular," and would not admit that she was pretty, but Miss Carew, though she said nothing, sighed, and scarcely wondered that her brother and Kingswood had called her beautiful.

Fortunately for Elsie's present comfort, the latter had not said a word about her dependent position at Maltby Grange; he merely said that he had met her there, and consequently it was supposed by his listeners that Elsie, like himself, was a guest at the time.

So, though Mrs. Thorn and Miss Carew would gladly have left Elsie uninvited, and would most certainly have done so had they known she was a paid companion, they could not in common politeness to Charlie do so now, and consequently she was hidden with Miss Birch to dine at the Nest on the following Monday.

Elsie accepted the invitation politely enough, but when the visitors were gone she said to her friend,—

"I would rather not go to this dinner if you don't mind leaving me at home; they don't want me, and I have no desire to visit them."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Charlie, with energy, "you must go with me. If I begin to leave you at home now I shall have to leave you at home a great deal; you don't know what these people are. They only ask me to their house because I own this big place. If I lost it all to-morrow Mrs. Thorn would pass me in the street and look through her eyeglass in the opposite direction."

"And yet you care to know such people?" asked Elsie, indignantly.

"You poor, unsophisticated child! My acquaintances would be few and far between if I troubled myself about such matters. I take things just as they come," returned Charlie. "It suits me to go to dine at the Nest next Monday, and you will go to oblige me. You won't find it very lively, but young Carew is rather a nice fellow, and you and he seem to get on capitally together."

"Yes, he was very nice yesterday. He explained so many things to me of which previously I was quite ignorant. He seems to be very fond of botany."

She said this simply and in absolute good faith, and Charlie, observing it, thought it wise not to disturb the sweet unconsciousness that would probably be the means of keeping Elsie and Arthur out of her way while she brought Kingswood to his senses.

Of course bringing him to his senses meant inspiring him with a due appreciation of her own charms.

It was decided, therefore, that Elsie was to go to the dinner party, and, accordingly, on the evening in question the three ladies from Monkshill entered the brougham, and were driven to the Nest, where other guests were already assembled.

Charlie was taken into dinner by the host, but she had Harry Kingswood next to her, while Arthur Carew had arranged for Elsie to sit next to him on the other side.

Elsie thought it a pleasant party, on the whole.

The dinner was good, and when the ladies retired to the drawing-room Charlie suggested that Elsie should sing.

I think I have said elsewhere that our little heroine possessed a very fine voice, and she now considerably astonished Mrs. Thorn and Miss Carew by her performance.

It was not a pleasant surprise. Arthur



[ARTHUR CAREW KNEW NOW THAT HIS FUTURE HAPPINESS LAY IN THE HANDS OF ELFIE.]

was passionately fond of music; he had a good voice, and he had tried very hard to get his sister to sing and play with him.

Without success, however; and here, the two ladies of the house felt, was a girl who, with her voice and her personal charms, could metaphorically twist the young man round her fingers.

"I must put a stop to this," thought Mrs. Thorn, resolutely.

And she rose, and made her way to the piano. But it is not easy to stop a lady in the middle of a song, and before that song was finished the mischief was done.

Arthur Carew was in the drawing-room, was standing by the side of the fair songstress, and if there had been any uncertainty in his mind before he left the dining-room he had no doubt now that his future happiness or misery lay in the hands of the girl who had thrown a new and a subtle meaning into the words and air of an old familiar song.

After this he sang, and then Charlie and Elfie played a duet; and though Mrs. Thorn politely interfered more than once, and called her nephew away on some pretext while some one else took his seat by the side of Elfie, still she did not succeed in keeping him long from the girl who possessed such a powerful attraction for him.

Charlie also enjoyed this evening far more than she had anticipated, for Mr. Kingswood, not being able to monopolise Elfie, was very glad to content himself with one who was much more amusing, if not so fair, and he several times that night called himself names that were not complimentary for longing for an unattainable shadow while a very inviting substance was within his reach.

The next event of importance in the eyes of Miss Birch was her own dinner party that was to take place the evening before the day on which Mr. Kingswood would terminate his visit to the Carews, and return to town.

That visit, so far as the hopes of Mrs.

Thorn and her niece were concerned, had been a failure, for it was quite obvious to both of them that the feminine attractions at Monks-hill quite eclipsed the more modest charms of the Nest, and, therefore, they were ready to speed rather than to delay the parting guest.

If Charlie hoped to bring matters to a successful issue between Kingswood and herself this evening, however, she was doomed to disappointment.

He was very nice, was all that she could desire, except that he was not lover-like, and he watched Elfie and Arthur Carew so persistently that Charlie was once tempted to remark,—

"You seem very much interested in that couple. Don't you approve of their getting on so well together?"

"I!" he exclaimed, with a start, and flushing angrily. "What business can it be of mine? It isn't I that shall upset Carew's apple-cart; but it will come to grief for all that."

"What do you mean?" asked Charlie, anxiously.

"Nothing," he answered, gloomily.

Then, as a sudden idea struck him, he asked,—

"You haven't turned match-maker, have you?"

"I? Certainly not!" she replied, indignantly. "What makes you ask the question?"

"Your own remark," was the curt rejoinder. "It sounded as though you had planned the whole affair."

"I never plan anything of the kind," she retorted hotly.

"It is best not to do so," he responded, coldly.

And soon after he and his party went away, and poor Charlie felt that they had scarcely parted like friends.

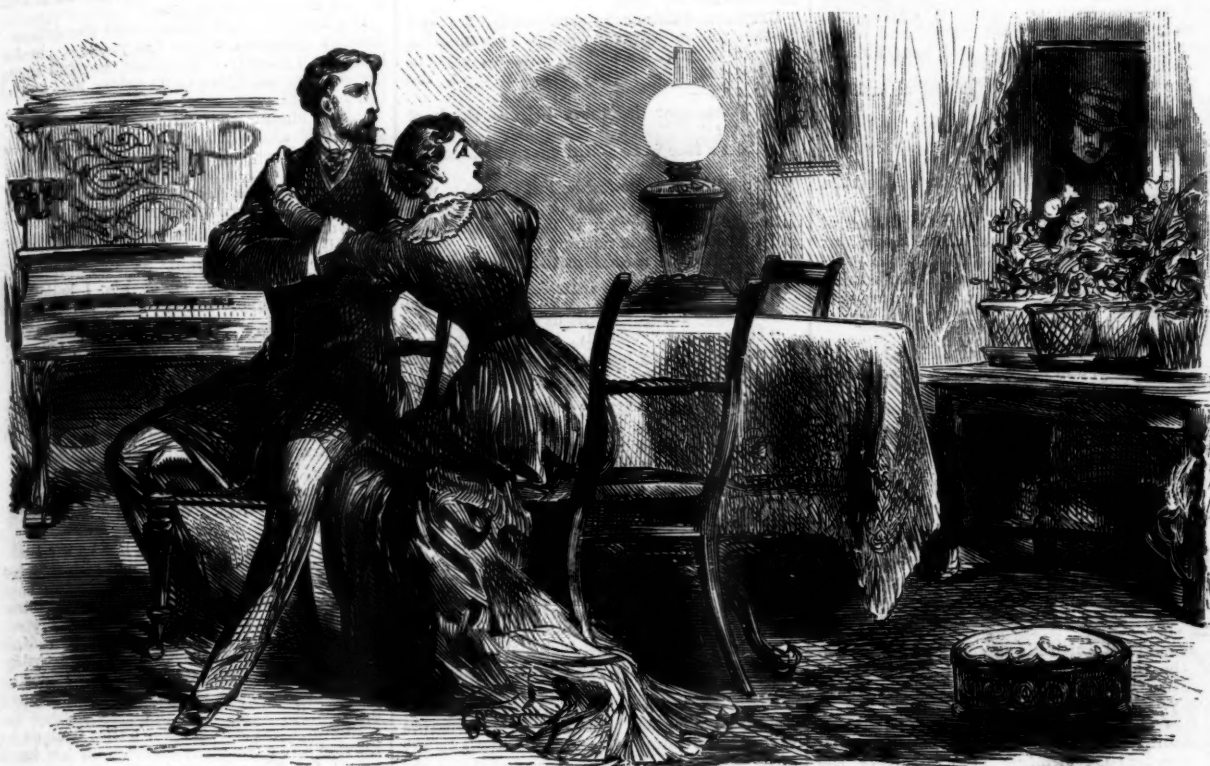
"Never mind; I shall see him at the ball," she thought, hopefully.

And she and Elfie after this night talked about the forthcoming ball at Trevellyn Court until all their thoughts seemed to be centred upon it.

But our heroine little dreamed of the influence which this ball was to have upon her future destiny.

(To be continued.)

EARLY PIRACY.—Piracy has been known from the remotest antiquity; for in the early ages every small maritime State was addicted to piracy, and navigation was perilous. This habit was so general that it was regarded with indifference, and, whether merchant, traveller or pirate, the stranger was received with the rights of hospitality. Thus Nestor, having given Mentor and Telemachus a plenteous repast, remarks that, the banquet being finished, it was time to ask his guests as to their business. "Are you," demands the aged prince, "merchants destined to any port, or are you merely adventurers and pirates, who roam the seas without any place of destination, and live by rapine and ruin?" The laws of Solon refer to authorised associations for piracy; the tribute-gathering fleet of the Athenians was a positive armament of speculating marauders; and almost all the early voyages were characterised by a union of fraud, robbery and exaction, under the name of trade. The test of the heroic Alexander's honesty is given in the answer he received on questioning a captive pirate as to what right he had to infest the seas: "The same that thou hast to infest the universe; but because I do this in a small ship I am called a robber; and because thou actest the same part with a great fleet thou art entitled a conqueror."



["OH!" SHERIEKED ISOLT, "THAT FACE, THAT FACE!" AND CLUNG TO BRIAN ALMOST UNCONSCIOUS THAT SHE DID SO.]

NOVELLETTE.]

THAT ECCENTRIC MISS HERNE.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. DREW had removed her lodger's breakfast things, and now was chatting in her maternal way to him. He stood before the window—a tall, well-knit figure, strong and muscular; and now and again he turned his handsome head and asked some trivial question, which Mrs. Drew answered in her roundabout way.

For a few moments his eyes had rested on the row of pretty semi-detached houses opposite, and Mrs. Drew noticed the third one claimed most of his attention. Presently he said,—

"How pretty the windows of number three are. The white curtains and tastefully-arranged flowers give the whole place an air of home. What sort of people live there?"

The landlady's answer this time was direct, much to Brian Varcoe's astonishment.

"Rather strange folks, sir, Mr. Herne and his sister. The people call her, 'that eccentric Miss Herne.' I suppose because she does things that no one else thinks of doing, and isn't like the other women of the town either in dress or manners."

"And what is Mr. Herne?"

"Cashier at the bank; and she keeps tradesmen's books; such a funny thing for a woman to do."

At that point Mrs. Drew was called away, and Brian began lazily to form some idea of "that eccentric Miss Herne."

He pictured her a tall, angular woman of uncertain age, very plain, very precise, sharp of voice and feature; and wondered inwardly how it was her house was the most attractive in the row.

Breaking upon his reverie came the sound

of many boyish voices, some full of thoughtless laughter, some of mockery.

"I thought Mrs. Drew told me this place was quiet," muttered the young man, discontentedly; "it's a perfect Babel."

Then there came in sight a troop of rosy, mischievous, and malicious boys, who followed with derisive shouts in the wake of a tall, powerfully-built negro, with the mildest of faces and most reproachful eyes.

Now and again he turned on his tormentors, and spoke some broken words of expostulation, which caused the young rascals to shout and laugh the louder, for a negro in quiet Westerton was a novelty.

Suddenly, as the man, driven to bay, faced the boys, the door of number three was opened, and a lithe, blue-robed figure ran down the steps and crossed to the stranger.

Brian leaned out of his window, and heard a clear voice say,—

"For shame, boys! Is it brave to molest a helpless, friendless stranger, a man who has done you no harm? Oh! you cowards."

And as the indignant tones vibrated through the air the boys shrank back as if ashamed, and only a low murmur broke from them. Before Brian could withdraw from the window to offer the young lady assistance she had taken one of the negro's black, horny hands in hers, that were thin and white.

"Come with me," she said, and led him unresistingly up the steps; and not until she was closing the door did she catch a glimpse of Brian's dark face and head.

The whole affair passed so quickly that it seemed unreal to the young man, and only the voices of the boys, as they trooped off to the grammar-school, convinced him he had not been dreaming. The glimpse he had caught of the young lady's face had favourably impressed him, and he admired her courage and kindness not a little.

"I wonder who she is—perhaps a niece or younger sister of the eccentric lady?"

He took up his hat and went downstairs, meeting Mrs. Drew in the tiny hall.

"I'm afraid you've been disturbed by the noise in the street," she said, apologetically; "but those schoolboys are regular 'limbs of Satan.' Did you see Miss Herne, sir?"

"The young lady in blue?" he questioned, and the landlady answered,—

"The very same, Mr. Varcoe. Did you ever see anything more absurd than the way she rushed out to that nigger? Kindness is all very well, but I don't believe in carrying it to such absurd lengths."

"I think I understand now why the young lady is called eccentric," Brian said, with covert amusement; and, wishing Mrs. Drew good-morning, went out, leaving her puzzled as to his opinion of Miss Herne.

Meanwhile, the young girl had seated her strange visitor in the pretty sitting-room, and now turned her bright, kind face upon him with the question,—

"Will you tell me your name?"

The grateful eyes grew softer as he answered her, brokenly,—

"Jo, missy; nothing but Jo."

"Where have you come from—is it far?" with a swift glance at his worn boots and dusty clothes.

He told her he had come from Liverpool, and brought with him a letter to Squire Atherton from a cousin in New Guinea, with which he drew out a soiled envelope, and bade her read its contents.

The grey eyes glanced along the irregular lines. They were full of warm praise of Jo, and the request that the Squire would take him into his service. The postscript said Jo had come to England to seek a lost brother, who, ten years ago, had arrived in the country with his master, and had never since been heard of.

Miss Herne folded up the letter.

"You haven't far to go now," she said, kindly. "Squire Atherton lives at Berrydown,

which is but two miles from the town; and he is reported to be generous. But, perhaps, you are hungry," and without waiting an answer she rang for fresh coffee, and began hastily to cut some bread and ham, bidding Jo eat.

The avidity with which he did so testified to a long fast.

When he had satisfied his hunger, and tried to thank his young hostess, she began to speak in the soft tones that to the negro's musical ear and grateful heart were the loveliest he had heard.

"You must not mind the curious glances of the people or the shouting of the boys, Jo; they are as unused to strangers in these parts that they are often very rude. I don't think they mean to be unkind; they are only thoughtless. Now let me direct you to Squire Atherton's."

The man rose slowly and clumsily; his dark eyes glinted, and his whole face was instinct with gratitude.

"Hasty," he said, with a sort of simple dignity that suited well his massive figure, "Miser, Heaven bless yer; nobody never gave me such goodness afore."

With a gesture Miss Herne stayed his words. "Don't thank me, Jo; there is no need," and led him to the door.

Then she directed him the road to Berrydown, gave him directions, and was about to close the door when Jo said suddenly,—

"Just stay a minute, missy. Like I shan't see yer no more, but if I can ever do somethin' for yer—"

He did not finish his speech, but taking one of the slender white hands reverently in his touched it with his lips, and went slowly away.

"Well I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Drew, watching behind the curtains. "What next, I wonder! A strolling nigger kissing her hand on the doorstep, too! The girl must be mad!"

What Westerton thought of her was a matter of perfect indifference to Miss Herne.

After Jo's departure she opened her desk quietly, and began to sort out a quantity of bills; then she produced a huge ledger from a recess, and sat down, prepared for a long morning's work.

Hour after hour the busy white fingers went nimbly over the lined pages, never pausing, never faltering in their work. She heard the rush of boys' feet down the street, and knew school was over, but she did not glance up; the sun shone brightly in her open window, the birds and butterflies flitted through the soft May air, the bees kept up a perpetual monotonous drone, but the pretty head was never lifted, the grey eyes never turned aside to look at the fair outer world until the church clock rang out a quarter to two.

Then Miss Herne gathered her papers and books together and placed them carefully in the recess, and a fresh-looking, country girl entered at the same time, and began to lay the cloth for dinner.

"We must be very quick, Lizzie," the young lady said, "or Mr. Herne will be in before we are ready," and she assisted the girl with those nimble white fingers of hers, that looked as if they had known no toil.

The simple preparations being completed, she walked to the window, yawned, and stretched out her arms, looked at her pretty round wrists with a sort of comical pity.

"Oh! dear, how dreadfully they ache!" she said, just a trifle wearily, and was quite unconscious that Brian Vance watched her from behind his curtains with half-curious, half-admiring eyes.

She heard a quick, firm step in the street, and ran to the door to meet her brother.

"Gilbert," she said, "I've quite an adventure to tell you; but come in and dine first. Poor old boy, you must be hungry."

Seeing her welcoming smiles and gestures, Brian was inclined to envy Mr. Herne the possession of such a pretty sister, and even

felt vexed when the door was closed, and he could see her no more.

Brother and sister sat opposite each other, and his face was very grave; the grey eyes meeting his grew dark with a sudden shadow, and, in some unlike her usually cheerful ones, the sister said,—

"Gilbert, dear, is it any help to think of that day?"

Gilbert's face wore a still more melancholy tinge.

"No help—it is madness, but thoughts will come whether we would or no. Isolt, my dear, do you remember it is your birthday, and I have given you nothing?"

She smiled, as if anxious to chase away his gloom.

"I had not forgotten. Won't you wish me many happy returns of the day?"

"How can I," bitterly, "when night and day I pray I may not live to see the anniversary of our shame?"

The girl shivered.

"Oh!" she said, bitterly. "Five long years we have borne the burden of another's sin—are we never to win forgetfulness, or be free of this nightmare fear? Gilbert, I am only twenty-two, and yet I have known as much sorrow as most folk. It isn't fair, and my whole soul protests against it!"

Then, at the sight of his misery, she rose, clasped her pretty hands about his neck, laid her brown head on his shoulder.

"Poor, poor old boy, I believe it has been worse for you than for me—it has made you old before your time, grave beyond your years."

"Whilst you, in your unselfishness, are all brightness; and, Isolt, you grow prettier each day!"

"You think so only because you love me," she said, returning to her seat; "no creature was ever so blind to my imperfections as my own brother," and the meal being ended she filled his pipe and gave it to him.

Then she gave him a brief account of the morning's adventure, and expressed a wish to hear what success poor Jo had had with Mr. Atherton.

Gilbert was very quiet for a time, then he said, gravely,—

"Do you know what people are saying of Mr. Atherton?"

"No; there is always some poor little scandal afloat, and you know I don't listen to gossip, Gilbert."

"I know that; but this concerns yourself, my dear. It is currently said that Mr. Atherton visits this house for your sake only, and that you give him every encouragement in your power, because he is rich, well-born, influential, and not for any merit he may possess."

Isolt's expression was one of supreme indifference.

"Is that all?" she questioned, calmly. "That is a very mild report for Westerton;" then, with a sudden change in face and manner, "Don't you remember, Gilbert, how five years ago I promised always to stay with you? Do you think I should break my word?"

"My dear," very gently, and with almost fatherly tenderness, "you have not yet met the man you could love. Atherton is generous, well-looking, rich, but he is not the man you will marry. One day, however, you will leave me for another home, and be happier in it than I could ever make you."

She knelt beside him, her fair face uplifted to his, and in her eyes the shadow of sorrow and shame lay deep and dark.

"Supposing I could even love anyone better, or even so well as you, Gilbert, what man, knowing our story, the fearful blot upon our name, would be willing to marry me? And I think, dear, it would kill me to tell it. Oh! Heaven," with sudden passion, "love is neither for you nor me. We are set outside and beyond it for ever, and all we can hope for is peace. We have been at rest here, but how long will our comfort last? If our story became known here, or if—he returns, as I feel he will, we must sit again—give up home

and occupation. Sometimes I feel as if the shameful secret will kill me."

Her fine grey eyes flashed and the delicate nostrils quivered, whilst the rounded cheeks had grown ghastly. The sun shone full upon her slim, young figure in its pretty blue gown, but Isolt shivered.

"Why should we meet trouble half-way?" she said, almost sharply, and but for the anguish in her voice one would have said she was angry. "Let us be glad whilst we may; and as for Denis Atherton, rest assured, my dear, I shall never leave you for him."

"But if he loved you well enough to overlook all, to ignore all—how then, Isolt?"

"Still my answer would be, 'no,'" quietly; "and as for this passion of his, I believe it purely imaginary. He has never said a word to me that might not have been proclaimed on the house-top. Change the subject, Gilbert; it is extremely unpleasant to me."

Always obedient to her will, always anxious to serve and please her, Mr. Herne said, without preface,—

"Mrs. Drew has let her rooms at last."

"I saw a man's head at the window this morning, and thought it would have been kinder had he protected Jo instead of looking idly down at him. Who and what is he?" indifferently.

"His name I don't know, but he is a land-surveyor, and has taken the apartments for six months; he arrived at Westerton only last night, and is said to have brought introductory letters to the Rainforths, so I suppose he is well connected. But, dear me, Isolt, it is nearly three—I must be off; punctuality finds favour at the bank. One day I may be manager—then you shall have good times and no work."

She watched her brother's slim form as he hurried down the quiet street, and her heart ached for him; he was only ten years her senior, but already his shoulders had contracted a "stoop;" his face was lined with care and thought, his eyes sunken, and his dark hair slightly streaked with grey. Isolt knew whose crime had made him an old man so early, whose hand had put love and joy out of his reach for ever; she knew, too, that in all the world none loved her so dearly as her brother, and that to him she was his dearest possession. With a sudden burst of passion she hid her face in her hands, and sobbed in a low, dreadful way.

"Oh, Heaven; oh, Heaven! five years ago to-day, and it seems a lifetime! Will nothing wash away the stain, or free us from this dreadful fear?"

But very soon she was calm again, and, taking a book, lay upon the couch, seemingly engrossed in a stirring story of love and adventures. The flickering light played in the folds of her dainty skirts, whilst her brown hair caught and imprisoned the stray sunbeams that were fain to wander over the white brow and kiss the heavily-fringed lids. In the middle of a chapter she was startled by a sharp peal of the door-bell, and a moment after Lizzie announced Mr. Atherton. Miss Herne rose from her couch, although her visitor made a deprecatory gesture; she blushed, too, remembering that all Westerton connected their names—she wondered had he heard the report. After shaking hands, and prevailing upon Isolt to take up her former position, the young man said,—

"I have come to thank you in Jo's behalf for your goodness and championship of his cause."

The colour mounted into her brow.

"It was an easy and simple thing I did; the poor fellow has exaggerated the details. But I am very glad he has reached you safely, and I sincerely hope you will be able to give him employment."

"Your wish is my law," bending somewhat towards her, "but in this you have been forestalled. My cousin—who sent him to me—was the dearest friend of my boyhood, and I could not refuse any request of his. The post of under-gardener was vacant, I have given it

to Jo; and, because you have expressed such interest in him, I shall see he wants nothing." She could not misunderstand his looks, although she feigned to believe his words mere polite commonplaces, and her eyes drooped before the young man's ardent gaze. The more confused she grew the greater was his confidence and courage. She was penniless, he rich—surely he might hope for her love! She was unknown, he a man of great importance in the county—but he scarcely thought of these things as he drank in every detail of her fresh, pretty face and dainty figure. He stooped over her, and stretching out one hand laid it upon hers.

"Isolt," he said, lingering over the name, because it was so dear to him.

The girl flushed deeply and unmistakably, and said, tremulously,—

"Mr. Atherton, you must not call me that; to you I am Miss Herne, the cashier's sister."

"You are far, far more to me than you think or believe—Isolt, my darling, my darling, I love you! I know you have never thought of me in that way, and I fancied it might be because I have never spoken to you of my love before. I knew you were too proud to give your heart to any man unsought, unasked."

She broke in hurriedly,—

"I had no suspicion of this. You have been very kind to me always, but I was not vain enough to imagine you desired me for your wife. I—I am very sorry—"

"You have not had time for thought; you confess yourself you had no idea of this. Give me time, my dearest, and I will teach you to love me. I can offer you all that most women long for, but I am ashamed to speak to you of my possessions—things that win others have no influence on you. Let me come again and again, day by day, and you will get used to the idea; in time I believe you will learn to love me. Darling, don't send me away hopeless."

Her face was white as she answered,—

"Mr. Atherton, you have done me high honour, and I should, indeed, be base if I could for a moment encourage groundless hopes. I do not love you. I shall never marry, because all my future life is devoted to my brother."

Denis Atherton was almost angry with her. "This is folly; no woman goes through life without learning the lesson of love. Tell me, have you anything to urge against me—any reason why you should not marry me?"

"Yes," Isolt answered, steadily, "but it has nothing to do with you, it belongs to my past; let it alone. There is a very real and cruel reason why I should never marry any man. Be satisfied with that, for I shall not tell you more of my story."

Denis looked wan in the broad, yellow light. "Are you married?" he faltered, and Isolt laughed.

"No, I am not married. Has any man save yourself visited me since I have been in Westerton?"

"No," he admitted, almost sullenly, "but for aught I know to the contrary you may be engaged."

"I am not even engaged, Mr. Atherton. Pray disabuse your mind of such absurd ideas; my life is bound up in Gilbert."

"Being neither engaged nor married," said Denis, "there is nothing to prevent me wooing and winning you, Isolt."

Then the girl answered, with face averted and down-dropped lids,—

"Oh, yes there is. To all your entreaties I must give 'no' for an answer. Ah! you are a man of honour, and will not repeat anything I may say to you. Our name was once as pure as your own, if not so great an origin. We were proud of our honour; we had high notions of our own importance, but now—but now—that is past! Our fair fame is tarnished, our shame so great we could not stay in our native place. My father died of a broken heart because a child of his had forgotten honour utterly, and when he was dead we—Gilbert and I—came away to a place where our shame is

not known, and where we may hold up our heads again."

Denis Atherton's face expressed surprise and confusion at Isolt's confession, but when she ended love again shone in his blue eyes, and he stretched out his hand to touch hers, but she shrank from him.

"Was [Gilbert the guilty one?] in a tone that said "I know he was," but she answered, swiftly,—

"Oh, no! no! How mad you must be to accuse him of crime!—he who has always been honourable, generous, self-denying—he who has given up every hope of joy he ever had!"

"Then," hoarsely, "it was you!" And yet in his love he did not shrink from her, and when he looked into her face he was ashamed of his thought, for he saw something there that was not guilt or remorse, but reproach.

"Forgive me," he cried, carried out of himself by his love, "Isolt, sweetheart, forgive me. I might have known, I should have known, you could not sin grossly; and even if the fault, the crime, were yours, I love you so dearly that I would willingly ignore it, whatever it may be. My darling girl, I cannot find anything good in my life if you persist in sending me away. I don't care what black sheep your family contains; I only know I love you. I only feel my name is powerful enough to outweigh the sin of the past, and for your sake I will find congenial employment for Gilbert—"

"Stay," Isolt cried, sharply. "You are tempting me sorely, and you are aware of that. It is not generous to tempt me thus; you know how much I long to help Gilbert to his one end and aim, but—but I am not quite prepared to do so at such a price—the loss of personal liberty, the right to love him and attend to his wants. Ah, no, I cannot marry you now or ever, Mr. Atherton."

He caught her hands, and holding them in his firm clasp, entreated,—

"At least give me some hope."

"No, it is kinder to tell you the plain, unvarnished truth. I do not love you, I will not marry you."

The fair, good-looking face began to grow harder in expression, but still he urged,—

"Why are you bent upon wronging yourself by giving up your whole life to your brother? He perhaps will marry at some future time, and brothers' wives are not always cordial friends. Let me give you a home, where you shall have nothing left to desire, where your whole life shall be one story of love. Ah! sweetheart, do not send me away; all I ever felt of good has come to me since first we met—for your sake I have resisted temptations, indulged in no dissipations. My darling! my darling! Heaven only knows what you are to me—how wasted my life will be without you!"

"You think so now," she answered, pitifully, but with no note of relenting in her clear, young voice; "in the future you will be glad I would not listen to you. If as I believe you are not only a gentleman, but a man, you will not urge me further, or at any time renew proposals that are so distasteful to me. For the honour you have done me I thank you, although I should never have believed your esteem greater had you not attempted to bribe me."

As she ceased he flung her hands aside, and with an oath, said,—

"You shall be my wife; I never lost a thing I really strove for. The day will come when you will love me and long for me, Isolt."

She was angry at last.

"If the idea comforts you, pray do not dismiss it from your mind," and the great, grey eyes flashed with scorn.

In his infatuation Denis thought her prettier in this mood than any other, and with a sudden forward movement he caught her in his arms and kissed the dainty mouth again and again with mad passion; and although she struggled to free herself he held her still, and in his embrace she was powerless as a little child. She lifted one hand and struck him upon the cheek; the blow was sudden and sharp

and with an angry expression he let her go. Then she confronted him and her face was deadly white, her eyes seemed to burn into his soul.

"So you think to win your wife by coercion!" she said, in intense tones. "You force your caresses upon a woman who will have none of them! You have behaved like the lowest ruffian, and if you had any chance of winning me you have lost it forever by your conduct. There is only one thing left me to do—it is to tell you to go from this house and never to enter it again."

"My darling! my darling! in a moment of passion I forgot myself. Surely you will grant forgiveness for such a venial fault? I think I must have been mad—"

But Isolt was too enraged to listen.

"Such presumption," she said, "is not easily forgotten," and with a gesture of dismissal turned to her desk.

Denis Atherton moved to the door, there he paused.

"Will nothing make you pitiful?" he questioned.

"I have said all I intend saying on the subject; pray consider it closed."

So he went out into the golden sunshine, with dark face and angry eyes.

"She shall be my wife, soon or late," he thought. "I love her so well that I will not accept my dismissal; with or without her will she shall marry me."

There was a storm of passion in his heart. He had always been fortune's favourite—had never yet desired anything money could not buy, and his disappointment was therefore the greater. But in all his life he had loved none so dearly as Isolt, the cashier's sister. She was not his equal by birth or wealth, but his love was so far unselfish that he cared nothing for these things—all he cared for, all he longed for, was that she would give herself to him. Men who knew his infatuation told him she was not even pretty, but to him hers was the loveliest face in all the world; and now, as he walked under the limes, he recalled the trick of her smile, the light in her eyes, the wonderful delicacy of her features, the lustrous red of the pretty lips, that, despite their firmness, were most kissable. He was very miserable for the remainder of that day, and his servants suffered from the effects of his rejection. But, despite his misery, he had determined in the course of the week to present himself once more at "number three," and not leave until he had won a full and perfect pardon.

Isolt Herne vainly tried to settle to her work, but the afternoon's occurrence had totally unfitted her for anything but thought.

"Thank Heaven!" she whispered to her heart, "thank Heaven! I did not love him; it would then have been almost too hard for me to send him away. Oh! must I always go under this heavy cloud? Will nothing ever do away with the shame and sin that spoil my life, and make fair things less fair to me?"

With the recollection of her secret yet upon her, she covered upon the couch and hid her eyes with those small, white hands that knew toil, and did not turn delicately from it. She did not cry, because tears left traces upon her face for hours, and she would not pain Gilbert; she only lay quite still, whilst the sun sloped slowly to the west, as if unwilling to go, and the birds outside made mad melody in the trees. At last she lifted herself on her elbow.

"If only I could feel as other girls do—if only one could forget the past! If only he were dead!"—she shivered at her own thought. "I am wicked enough to pray he may never return, wicked enough to wish his death! Oh, Heaven! how terrible his memory has made these last five years!"

Lower and yet lower sank the sun; the music in the trees was dying away; only an occasional twittering broke the silence, save for a lark that yet sang high up in the air; sweet scents came in at the open window, and the gnats buzzed loudly round the clustering vine.

The girl stirred uneasily, because all these

things recalled more vividly just such an evening five years ago, when first life had grown dark for her, when she had seen the light stricken out of her father's face, and heard Gilbert's hoarse cry of agony and shame.

She remembered, too, the rapid wasting of the life so dear to her, the misery of that beloved face, as white as the pillows upon which it lay for three short weeks, that yet seemed ages to the sufferer because they were full of sudden dishonour.

"Oh! father, father!" the girl muttered, under her breath. "Why could I not die too? Why was I so strong that the shame had no power to kill me?"

She was very wretched. It was not often she allowed herself to dwell so much upon the past, because she had Gilbert to consider; and since their trouble came he had been father, mother, brother, all in all to her, and she strove to keep his home cheerful, and to meet him with bright smiles when he came weary from his daily tasks.

"He must not see me thus," she thought; and, springing up, went to her room, from which she presently emerged, dressed for walking.

Standing at the foot of the staircase she called Lizzie, and when the girl appeared left a message with her for Gilbert, to the effect that as her head ached badly she had gone out, and if he chose to meet her he was to go through the Oakley meadows.

She walked slowly, feeling unusually tired and languid. But soon she reached the meadows, and sat down on a stile to rest before going further.

What a pretty picture she made sitting there in the most graceful attitude, the dark green of the chestnuts forming a good background to her pale blue dress and great white hat! Her face was very quiet, and, but for the shadows in her eyes, might have been thought happy.

So long she sat there that twilight came on, and a little alarmed (for Miss Herne was not remarkable for physical courage) she sprang from her perch and turned homewards.

She half hoped to meet Gilbert, but as yet his figure was not to be seen, and she went through the meadow swiftly.

At the end was a gate leading into a lane; a man was leaning upon it smoking, but at the sound of her steps he turned, and, standing a little aside, held the gate open for her.

As she passed through she gave one swift glance into his face, and, bowing, thanked him for his courtesy; not with the frigid bow so ungracious, and yet so common amongst Englishwomen, but with a pretty and somewhat deep inclination of her head and a faint smile.

She wondered a little who he was. He, for his part, took up his old position, and watched the pretty, graceful figure so fast disappearing down the lane.

"Strange," he said, "I should meet her in this way, on the very first day of my life here. What a nice voice she has, and what wonderful eyes! Wherein lies her great eccentricity? It is certainly strange she has no friends," and a strong desire to know her filled the young man's heart. "I believe I'm growing curious," he thought, as he threw away the end of his cigar. "I never felt greatly interested in any woman before," and he walked with quick, long strides down the grassy lane, and soon overtook Isolt and Gilbert, who had just joined her.

He passed them by, thinking, as he cast a swift glance at the brother, what a melancholy face his was—what an utter contrast to the young girl's—how much of resolution there was in her, how little in his.

"That is the polite stranger," Isolt whispered, pressing Gilbert's arm. "I wonder who and what he is?"

"Certainly not a native of Westerton, or he would not have behaved so courteously to you, Isolt."

"Oh," with a smile, "I didn't for a moment believe a native would be guilty of such re-

finement. He opened the gate, and stood with his hat in his hand until I had passed through. Oh! it has flashed upon me who he is—Mrs. Drew's lodger. I am sure it is he, though I only saw his head this morning."

Gilbert smiled in his melancholy way.

"And you recognised the head?"

"And shoulders," Isolt added. Then, after a pause, "Do you know, dear, this has been a very eventful day. First I had an adventure with a negro and some schoolboys, next—"

"Well, what next?" he questioned, as she paused. "The second event occurred this afternoon, I suppose?"

"Yes; Mr. Atherton came to assure me Jo should have employment, and he said—he asked—oh! Gilbert, it is so strange, following on your words so closely—but he asked me to marry him."

She blushed brightly as she spoke, and glanced timidly at her brother.

"What answer did you give him?" he questioned, after a momentary silence.

"I told him I could never be his wife, because I did not love him, and when that did not satisfy him, I said there was a secret in our family that if known would prevent any man making me his wife."

Gilbert interrupted nervously,—

"Was it well to say so much? And even did he know it, if he loved you he would marry you."

"And probably twit me with my dishonour afterwards. He is honourable enough to keep silence about our troubles. As much as he knows of it is safe with him; but he has made me angry, and I do not wish to see him again."

CHAPTER II.

It was a week later, and Denis Atherton had made several attempts to win Isolt's forgiveness, but in vain. He had sent her choice flowers, with a short, but penitent note; she returned both by the bearer, who was none other than Jo; then he had remembered a wish she once expressed for a "Gloire" bush, and selected the finest for her; but this, too, she rejected, and Jo said,—

"Ah! but missy should see massa's face when him gets his presents back—it is sad as if him had lost a brudder."

Perhaps the negro's words touched her more than anything Denis could say or do; so that when she met him the following day, and he, pausing, put out his hand, she laid hers in it, feeling grieved for the pain she had inflicted.

"Miss Isolt," he said, "I know I deserved your anger, but I think it is not impossible to find an excuse for my conduct. Are we never to be friends any more? If I promise not to renew my proposals, if never by look or word I refer to that scene of a week ago, may I visit you on the old footing?"

"I shall be glad, indeed, if you will. Gilbert misses you, and we have neither friends nor acquaintance but you."

They were near her home, and, touched by his humility, she asked him to go in with her, and he joyfully accepted, much to Brian Varcoe's chagrin. He was growing more interested in Isolt than he cared to think, and it did not please him to hear her name coupled with Mr. Atherton's. He set his lips, and vowed to himself he would know before another week had passed. He longed to see and hear what was passing in that pretty room, with its flowers and dainty curtains. After all, it was a very unimportant scene, or appeared so; Isolt had seated herself, but Denis stood looking down upon her.

"Miss Herne," he said, "I am going away. I would infinitely prefer staying at my own place, but the Fates won't permit it. I have accepted a long-standing invite, and start for town to-morrow, where I shall remain three weeks. I have left orders that the gardens and conservatories are entirely at your service, and Jo can bring you any fruit or flowers you may wish. Pray don't

refuse to accept them," as she began to speak hurriedly. "Please remember we are friends."

"Yes," she said, "and from to-day we will not refer to the past, only tell me you have forgiven my too harsh words. I do not like to part with any anger between us, any unpardoned offence, because we cannot tell what may happen in three weeks—one of us may die."

She was touched, she was kind.

"Yes," he said, exultantly to himself, "I have got in the thin edge of the wedge."

He did not stay long, and when he left Isolt was almost sorry, because he was always good to her, and his was the only friendly face that ever smiled in the pretty rooms of "number three."

That same evening, when she sat alone, she heard Gilbert's step, and another that was strange to her. The next moment her brother entered the room, and with him was Mrs. Drew's lodger. Isolt rose, and a faint colour crept into her fair face, but her manner had the gracious charm of a high-born lady, as she welcomed their visitor.

"I am afraid," she said, "we can offer you very little amusement."

But Gilbert interrupted quickly,—

"Oh! Mr. Varcoe is a botanist, and it is through a similarity of tastes that we have been brought together; Mr. Rainforth effected the introduction, saying we should be mutually pleased. If you will give us a cup of tea, my dear, we will start on our expedition at once. Like myself, Varcoe's evenings only are at his disposal."

Isolt poured out tea and gave them it in dainty crimson and gold cups; then Brian said,—

"But surely you will share our ramble, Miss Herne?" and was disappointed when she said,—

"I wish I could, but it is impossible; I have a great quantity of posting to do; to-morrow my time will be my own."

"Mrs. Drew told me of your occupation," the young man rejoined coolly. "Isn't it a strange one for a girl. What made you choose it?"

"Necessity," with the suggestion of a smile. "The fact is Mr. Varcoe, I was not accomplished enough to be a governess, and if I had been I could not have left Gilbert. So, as I wished to earn money, he taught me book-keeping after his work at the bank was done, and I find it pays very well."

"You have not always lived at Westerton?" drinking in every line of face and form as he spoke.

"No, only for the last few years; our old home was at—in the North," with sudden, unaccountable confusion. "And we are absolutely friendless, with the exception of Mr. Atherton—oh! I might add, and his negro servant Jo."

"Oh, I've seen him," Brian remarked; "he is the man you rescued from those wretched schoolboys. Really, Miss Herne, I've wanted to explain and apologise for my ungallant conduct that morning, but I got no opportunity until this evening. The fact is, before I had recovered my surprise at your sudden appearance you had got the poor fellow inside."

She laughed and blushed.

"I did think it would have been kinder of you to help than look on," and before he could answer, Gilbert seized his arm.

"You shall settle the dispute when we return. At present I am all impatience to be gone (botany was Gilbert's hobby), daylight won't last much longer. But when we come back Isolt shall sing to you, if you like music."

Isolt! What a pretty name it was! How admirably it suited the clear-cut face that would have been proud but for an almost indescribable expression that was not all sorrow or bitterness.

Brian was angry with himself for thinking so much of Isolt's grey eyes and so little of

the ferns and flowers they gathered, and he was glad when the light grew too dim and uncertain for them to distinguish one blossom from another, and Gilbert announced regretfully that they must go home.

What a pleasant picture that dainty sitting-room made when viewed from the street! Brian, who was utterly alone in the world, felt a thrill of pain as he looked on it; the flowers were in the window, the blind was up, and through the lace curtains he saw pictures, brackets and dainty ornaments, none of them expensive, but all in good taste; at the open piano sat Isolt, her white fingers straying idly over the keys, her pretty brown head nodding time as she played. She would have risen, but Gilbert said,—

"Don't move, Isolt; Varcoe wants you to sing. Let us have your latest song, my dear."

"Am I encroaching on your kindness, Miss Herne?" bending over her, and laying flowers and ferns before her, she shook her head.

"Not at all, Mr. Varcoe. Are these for my acceptance?"

"I shall be proud if you think them worthy," he answered with a thrill of strange, new pleasure; she rose and ringing for water arranged them in some vases, he watching every movement of her nimble fingers. Then she sat down before her instrument again, and saying,—

"I am neither an accomplished singer, nor have a powerful voice; mine is but a mezzo-soprano." She struck a few notes and began to sing "Dreaming," one of Milton Welling's best ballads. The melancholy music rose and fell, the words throbbed as it were into Brian's heart and brain, and his eyes never left the girl's face. But unconscious of his scrutiny she sang on.

"Once again I saw the river,

Where the water-lilies grow,

Where the willow branches quiver,

As the gentle zephyrs blow.

And I heard those well-loved accents,

That once held my heart in thrall,

And they whispered words of promise—

I was dreaming that was all

I was dreaming, only dreaming,

I was dreaming, that was all."

When the singer ceased Brian still stood beside her, and on his face there was a new look—he sighed a little.

"If I might come here often—," he began; and Gilbert, who had conceived a violent fancy for him, said,—

"Come every evening if you choose; we shall be glad to have you. Shall we not, Isolt?"

Brian turned anxiously towards her.

"May I come, Miss Herne?"

"Certainly," she said. "I am very poor company for Gilbert; you will do him good."

He thanked them with a sigh.

"You can't imagine what it is to be a friendless, homeless fellow like me; why, I haven't a relative in the world."

"Pray, don't consider that a trial!" Isolt interrupted, with a bitter laugh. "For my part, I think the fewer one has the better; and the man who said, 'preserve me from my friends,' was not alone in his prayer. Oh! you looked terrified! and I suppose you prepared for anything queer in my speech and ways. Of course, Mrs. Drew has told you what the natives call me?"

He answered confusedly she had.

"Pray, feel no embarrassment on my account," with a suspicion of mockery in her eyes. "I am accustomed to my name now," with the greatest *sang froid*.

After that night Brian was often seen at "number three," and before he knew it he had given his first and best love to "that eccentric Miss Horne."

She puzzled him often. One day she would be indifferent, even to coldness; another she was cordial—welcomed him in her pretty, frank way.

There was no rival in the field. Atherton was away, and Brian determined to make the

most of his opportunity. They talked together; sang, rowed, and walked. Sometimes Gilbert joined them, sometimes they went alone.

One evening, in early June, they went through the Berrydown meadows, and Isolt was unusually gentle. She talked in low tones—made no bitter little speeches; and the young man's heart leapt within him for very joy.

He gathered wild roses, wet with dew and half closed, and, cutting away the thorns, gave them to her. She would always remember that evening, because in her darker days it would stand out so bright—so cruel a contrast.

They sat down on a grassy knoll; and Isolt, looking up, saw the nests of myriad rooks in the trees above her head, and drew Brian's attention to them.

Together they listened to the faint hum of the gnats, becoming each moment fainter as the twilight deepened; saw the little clouds sail over the clear sky; heard the far-away song of the sailors in the bay scarce a stone's throw from where they sat, and the indescribable murmur of the sea.

Neither was willing to break the pleasant silence, and the girl had suddenly grown conscious of a great yearning towards this man beside her; but as yet the fear that came with her love was almost sweet.

"I wish," Brian said, at last, "this sort of thing could go on for ever; but the last month has sped so quickly that it seems my stay at Westerton will be over before I realise I am beyond the beginning of it."

"Don't speak of going!" Isolt said, and he was glad her voice grew tremulous. "Gilbert will miss you sorely."

"And you?" bending over her—"shall you not miss me a little? Am I so unhappy as not to have won your friendship?"

She toyed with her roses.

"Yes, I shall feel I have lost a pleasant companion, whose loss cannot be easily supplied—at least in Westerton. Then you will go your way, and I mine. At first you may regret the parting, and I may be lonely in the long evenings when Gilbert stays late at the bank. After that we shall forget, or remember only at odd and rare intervals." She paused and sighed; but Brian said, gravely,—

"I don't think your view of the case is a correct one; and I wish you would not contract the habit of saying unnecessarily bitter things. Old memories are the clearest and the dearest."

"So I have found you at last!" cried Gilbert's voice close by. "Don't you think it imprudent, Isolt, to sit on the grass after the dew has begun to fall?"

She rose confusedly.

"Perhaps it is. Let us go home."

The trio walked on through the gloaming, but the girl was very quiet. She listened, too, without understanding Gilbert's and Brian's talk on botany. Their voices sounded very far away and indistinct. In her heart was she wild cry,—

"I love him!—I love him!—and, oh! what can my love bring me but misery? Oh, Heaven! how can I tell him all? How bear to see his scorn and loathing?"

When they entered the sitting-room they found some letters lying upon the table. There were two in the same handwriting; one for Gilbert and one for Isolt.

The brother, too intent upon his grasses and weeds to care for correspondence of any kind, sorted out the rarer specimens of that evening's gathering; but the girl took up her letter and suddenly cried out in her anguish,—

"Oh, Heaven!—Oh, Heaven; this is too cruel!"

Gilbert started and moved towards her, but Brian was first. He threw an arm about her, because she was ghastly and looked as though she would fall.

"What is it, Isolt?" the brother questioned; and as his eyes fell upon the letter in her hand he in his turn grew white and trembled.

Isolt twisted herself from Brian's arm.

"Let me be!" she moaned. "Do not touch me, for pity's sake! I have had a terrible shock!"

He wondered how she could know that letter contained bad news when she had not even broken the seal; but he said nothing, and she sank upon the couch, moaning and shivering, as if in bodily anguish.

Gilbert stood by her, and laid his thin hands on her bowed head.

"Hush, darling," he said, pitifully—"don't break down. You have always been my comfort. I want your help now."

The words, although they sounded selfish, were not so, being spoken only with a view to bracing Isolt's nerves to the inevitable trouble before them.

She lifted her ashen face and spoke in a strange, dull way to Brian.

"You must forgive me, Mr. Varcoe. I did not mean to display so much vulgar feeling." Her grey eyes were wide with anguish as she added, "Do not think me inhospitable, or that Gilbert and I do not value your friendship, but it would be a relief to us now to be alone."

He took her little trembling hand in his.

"I am not likely to misconstrue your words," gravely, "and please remember I am wholly at your command, and I hope you will find your letter conveys good news."

"That handwriting," she said, pointing towards the envelope, which had fallen to the floor, "never brought joy to any. For your sympathy we thank you. To-morrow we shall be ready again to receive you. Good-bye!"

She did not draw her hand from his, and in her eyes there was a passionate appealing, as if for help. He bent very low over her.

"Remember," he said, "my greatest joy would be to do you service."

Then at last brother and sister were alone, and Gilbert's courage failed him. He sank into a chair.

"Read the cursed things—I can't!" and Isolt rose to the occasion.

Her voice did not rise above a whisper, and now and again she looked round, as if fearing some listener. When she had ended Gilbert laid his hand on hers.

"Heaven grant he may not return to us. Heaven grant he may die before!"

He paused, knowing there was no need to say more.

The girl shivered. Her brother's prayer had so often been her own; but she broke out, harshly,—

"What use is it to appeal to Heaven? Oh, Heaven! things have been cruel so long! and now—now, just when I have a glimpse of happiness, and can, for awhile, forget my misery, a darker cloud comes over us. If he comes here! Oh! say, what shall we do?—how hide our secret longer? Everyone will learn it—everyone will shun us, save Mr. Atherton, perhaps; and—and Mr. Varcoe will be angry that he made overtures to us."

Something in her voice, her face, roused the brother.

"You unhappy child," he said, drawing her to him, "has that been added to your burden? Do you love this man?"

She made no answer, only clung closer to him, and hid her face upon his shoulder, whilst he passed his hand caressingly, pitifully, over her pretty hair.

"Isolt, have you any grounds to believe he returns your affection?"

"He is kind!" she answered, fiercely. "I may not ask—I dare not hope—for love from him! Oh! if he knew all he would shrink away from me. Gilbert, I can't tell him all. I would rather tell any man than he."

She did not cry, she did not sob. Sorrow and shame had so long been her daily portion that she rarely wept to think of it now. But to-night she had been so happy, had forgotten everything but her love, so that the blow she had received was doubly cruel.

But in the morning, when Brian Varcoe called, she was calm and even cheerful.

"I'm afraid I quite startled you last night,"

she said, apologetically. "You will greatly oblige me by forgetting my curious conduct."

Something like doubt of her stirred the young man's heart. Why should she be so anxious that he should forget?—and why should the sight of a bold man's handwriting make her tremble and grow pale with fear?

Had she a lover unknown to him? Because of his doubts his manner was constrained, and the wretched girl asked her heart,—

"Has he discovered anything?" and wore a confused look, that increased Brian's doubts and fears.

But the young man had given her his honest love, and in the evening he went again to "number three," this time to find Denis Atherton a guest.

Gilbert introduced the two, and they regarded each other with an unspoken, but very palpable animosity.

Denis thought, "This fellow, then, is the cause of the change in Isolt!" and hated him. Brian said,—

"He is a rival!" and all that evening would not quit the girl's side. But he had an engagement at ten, and was compelled, therefore, to leave the field to Denis, who showed no sign of going, although Isolt yawned and professed great weariness.

Gilbert went to the front door with Brian and then hurried off to a little room, where he classified and pressed his flowers; so that Mr. Atherton and Isolt were alone.

The former took immediate advantage of the position.

"Miss Herne," he said, vexedly, "what does that fellow do here? What does he mean by dropping in at any hour, and staying such an unconscionable time?"

Isolt lifted languid eyes to his.

"Really, Mr. Atherton, your conduct amuses me, because the same questions might be asked of you. Mr. Varcoe is Gilbert's friend and mine, and in this house we do not intend he should be insulted."

The quietude of her manner angered him more than any passionate display of feeling.

"Look here, Isolt!" he cried, almost coarsely, "I have sworn to make you my wife, and I will not go from my word! I love you with all my soul!—with all my life!—and the man who comes between us will find he has a dangerous rival to deal with!"

Miss Herne rose. "Because you love, or fancy you love me, you presume to dictate and threaten. Really, Mr. Atherton, you are an honour to your race! I told you not long since I could not marry you, and *would not*, even were I as other girls. Now I tell you your present conduct is that of a clown, a rustic; and I shall be glad if you will cease visiting here."

"Are you afraid of Varcoe's jealousy?" madly. "I will come again and again! The town shall ring with our names coupled together! My dear—my pretty lass!—say you have been jesting! Don't drive me mad with your gibes and sneers! I love you with all my heart, but I would murder you rather than see you another man's wife! Isolt, my darling, listen to me!"

The clear pallor of her face was tinged with faintest pink.

"Your manner offends me," she said, coldly. "If you will not consent to behave as a gentleman I shall ring for Gilbert."

Her steady hand was ready to carry out her promise, but with a sudden movement Denis seized the white fingers in his.

"I will say what I intend saying first!" he cried, fiercely. "To-night I came, after an absence of three weeks. How did you welcome me? With frigid bow and faint smile. I hoped my absence would prove me necessary to your happiness; but no sooner had I gone from Barrydown than this stranger, whom nobody knows—this immaculate Brian Varcoe—takes my place; teaches you forgetfulness and dislike of me; and by Heaven he shall suffer! If you think I shall stand tamely by whilst he wins what I covet and have striven for, you have formed a poor idea of my character."

Isolt! oh, my dear—my dear—be kind to me. Save me from my own passions! Before I knew you I was no worse than other fellows—*now* I am a murderer at heart."

He dropped her hands and tried to catch her to him; but she was swifter than he, and so escaped the threatened embrace. Her voice was clear and cold as she answered,—

"I thought in these days a woman had some right to choose her husband. From your words I gather I am mistaken. But I will tell you candidly, Denis Atherton—had I no past—were I free from grief and—and shame, and you the highest noble in the land—the most perfect man, I would not marry you! Oh, you would be last of all that I could choose; but you need have no fear of rivalry. Mr. Varcoe has shown me no preference—neither has he threatened me. Of the two I prefer his friendship to your love!"

"You think to deceive me!" furiously; "but I see through all your juggling; and if you do not marry me no other man shall call you wife!"

A sinister light shone in his blue eyes, and his face was deathly pale with passion and hatred of his rival.

"This is amusing," Miss Herne said, as if to herself, although her heart trembled with fear. "What an ornament you would have been to the stage—a model villain—a picturesque bandit!"

She could not stay the mocking words—perhaps she had no desire then to do so; but Denis sprang to her side.

"Someone shall suffer for this!" he said, speaking now low because of the intensity of his rage; "and as for you, Isolt—you will marry me, and learn to be content. You cannot escape me. I have never been thwarted by any man, and surely a woman is powerless to oppose me?"

She smiled contemptuously. "Woman's wit has often proved too much for man's strength," she said, quietly.

Then before he knew what she was about to do she clashed the bell, and he stood silent and defeated before her.

"Lizzie," when the girl appeared, "show Mr. Atherton out!"

He bit his lips with rage, and in passing her said,—

"Let Varcoe take care!"

"He is perfectly able to protect himself against open assaults!" she retorted, with galling cheerfulness.

And so they parted—the young squire to stride homewards, with dark face and brooding eyes; the girl to take up a novel, and seemingly find pleasure in it.

The bright days wore by; and Atherton, having cut himself off from "number three," grew morose, and blamed anybody but himself for his fault.

Now and again he met his rival in the street; but no word passed between the men, since Denis had given Brian the cut direct; only their glances were masterpieces of hate and scorn.

And Mr. Varcoe was seen every day at "number three." One lovely evening early in July he sat with the brother and sister. The lamp was lit, but the blinds not down, and the three were only screened from the observation of casual passers by the plants in the window, which were Isolt's special care.

They spoke of many and indifferent things, and their tones were so low that one at least of the trio could hear the faintest sound peculiar to summer nights. She heard something more—the stealthy tread of a human foot.

"Listen, Gilbert!" she said, nervously, "there is some one in the garden!"

The window was open, and her words passed out into the night. Gilbert rose and looked out; but seeing no intruder went back to his seat, saying,—

"You are fanciful, Isolt—no one is there."

But the girl was unconvinced, and glanced now and again towards the window apprehensively.

Suddenly Gilbert rose.

"I must go out, Isolt. I quite forgot to give Nestley, the bank manager, a note from Mr. Skelsey. He has gone to town, and it is important Nestley should have the message to-night. As my sister is so nervous perhaps you will kindly stay with her until my return, Varcoe?"

The latter readily promised to do so; and Gilbert hurried out into the night.

Brian drew his chair nearer to Isolt, and began to talk of his past life, and his present loneliness, in low tones, and in his eyes there was a look the girl could not misunderstand.

"I am far from rich," he said, "and depend solely upon my own exertions for a livelihood; but with courage and perseverance one may do much. You think a woman might safely venture to cast in lots with me?"

Before Isolt could reply she was conscious of a pair of eyes looking fixedly at her, and, glancing fearfully towards the window, saw a face pressed close to it.

"Oh!" she shrieked, "that face! that face!" and clung to Brian, almost unconscious that she did so.

Comprehending at once that some one had been looking in upon them, he gently loosed her hands, and prepared to rush into the garden, and if possible capture the intruder, who was probably a tramp.

But Isolt clung convulsively to him. "Oh! do not—do not leave me! I am afraid to be alone! For pity's sake stay!"

He felt somewhat vexed, and answered, quickly,—

"You are perfectly safe, Miss Isolt. There is nothing here to harm you, and I will not go beyond the garden."

But sinking on her knees, still clasping one of his hands, with her white face uplifted, she entreated,—

"Oh! do not go! It was a cruel, wicked face! The man may be armed—he may have companions! For your own sake stay here!"

Her anxiety for his safety was very pleasant to him, and his heart beat high. He forgot all but her presence and her fears, which had not been entirely for herself.

"I will stay," he said, softly, and lifting her from her knees placed her upon a couch.

But her terror was not spent. She lay shivering with hidden face, and seemed incapable of further speech. He bent low over her,—

"Miss Herne—Isolt—there is really no need for fear. Do you doubt my power to protect you if there were?"

She murmured something he could not hear; and he bent his face so low it almost touched her pretty hair.

"The cruel eyes!" in a dreadful whisper.

"Oh, Heaven! oh, Heaven! those cruel eyes!" Her fear seemed a little unreasonable to Brian; but he argued with himself that men do not understand a woman's delicate and highly-strung organisation, and because of his love was very patient and pitiful.

He lifted her a little, and kept his arm about her pretty form. She was hardly conscious in her misery of his touch, and he knew that.

"Isolt"—his familiarity was not strange to her—"is there no one you would choose to spend the night with you? You are quite unfit to be alone. Let me send Mrs. Drew to you."

"No, no!" eagerly. "I am less frightened now; and Gilbert will soon be home. Don't tell him of my fright—it was very stupid of me to be so easily scared."

And, blushing, she released herself from his arm. Suddenly she turned to him.

"You have been good to me always—my first and best friend; and if I do not seem to thank you as I should it is because my heart is too full for much speech; but there is something in my mind to-night I must say to you. Perhaps the time is very near when you will learn I have not been quite open with you—I have not told you all that I should;

and when that day comes I pray you to remember how very often I made the effort and failed, and how at last I felt I would rather die than tell my sad story to you!"

"But why," Brian asked, "will you not confide in me? Am I unworthy your trust?"

"No," she answered, shivering still; "but I am unwilling to forego your friendship until it is impossible to retain it longer. We are very lonely—Gilbert and I—and are not great favourites with the people here. At least let us retain your esteem while we may. In November you will leave Westerton; and it will be less hard to bear your scorn when you are away than whilst you are daily meeting us in street or field."

He was sorely puzzled; but he said,—
"Is Gilbert implicated in the story, or does it concern yourself only?"

"He suffers too," she answered, wearily. "Through the fault of another his whole life is blighted. Oh, Mr. Varcoe, you have seen him only as he is now—reserved, melancholy, hopeless; but there was a time when he was different. Five years ago the blow came that robbed him of all he most prized. He was engaged then to a girl who seemed devoted to him, and they were on the eve of marriage."

"When our trouble fell upon us he went to her, and told her all, offering her her freedom if she wished it. Acting on the advice of her friends she accepted it, and so crushed out any joy, or hope of joy, that might have remained in his heart."

"We came away from all we knew, and for five years it has been our endeavour to hide ourselves from old friends, old acquaintances—to forget the old life, with its myriad associations and pleasures. How far we have succeeded you know."

"Tell me," and his voice sounded strangely hoarse, "is the secret a shameful one?"

"Yes," she answered, and covered her eyes. "Do not ask more—I can tell you nothing further!"

There was a short silence. Then Brian Varcoe said,—

"I cannot believe the disgrace is yours, Isolt. I am ready to stake my life on your purity and innocence!"

And before he could say more she cried out,—

"Oh! Heaven bless you! Heaven bless you for those words!" and hearing Gilbert's returning steps roused herself, and strove to meet him cheerfully.

He looked at her with anxious eyes. "Well, my dear, have you recovered your fright? Ah! I see you have; but you will give Mr. Varcoe a very poor idea of your courage."

He smiled faintly, and sat down beside her; but she said nothing of the face she had seen at the window; and when Brian rose to go she whispered,—

"Remember, you are to say nothing to Gilbert?"

"Your will is my law."

He glanced round, and saw Gilbert intent upon his barium, and lifting her hand to his lips kissed it once, whilst the hot colour flooded her face and brow.

So he left her, and Gilbert went with him to the door.

"It is a lovely night!" he said. "If Isolt were not so nervous I would beg you to walk through the meadows. Who was that, Varcoe?" as a dark figure passed the gate swiftly, and turned the corner of the street.

"I don't know; but I fancy it was a tramp, and he seemed to be hiding behind the laurels. I think it would be as well, Herne, to keep your blinds down in future; your pretty rooms may impress the light-fingered gentry with a sense of wealth."

Then he crossed to his lodgings, and went slowly up to his room. He was restless that night—sorely troubled in his mind about Isolt. He loved her purely and unselfishly; but he was not prepared to marry her if the shame she had spoken of was of her own working.

A father's or a brother's sin could not detract from her worth if she herself were his ideal woman; but his wife must be *sans peur et sans reproche*.

In the middle of the night he rose, and looking from his window saw her light yet burning.

Ah! if he could have seen that writhing form upon the little white bed—have heard the terrible, half-strangled sobs that broke from her poor pale lips! Would he have yearned to comfort her, or would his heart turn from her—its vague fears grown into awful certainty?

"Oh, Heaven!" the unhappy girl moaned. "Oh, Heaven! what shall I do? That he should come back—and now! I could have borne it better two months ago! Oh! fool! fool! to drift into this cruel love! Why could I not go on without a thought or care for any save Gilbert?"

The beautiful dawn came at last, and found her spent with anguish, pale and heavy-eyed—too weary to moan or cry longer. She hid her face in her pillows and tried to get a little rest; but no sleep would come to her.

So after awhile she rose, drew up her blind, and then lay watching the fleeting tints in the early morning sky.

The hours passed by. Lizzie was astir, and it was time she roused herself; so she dressed her pretty hair with deft fingers that did not tremble, and fastened white lace about her throat; then went down and took her place at the breakfast-table, greeting Gilbert with a kiss and a faint smile.

When he remarked on her pallor she answered quietly she had not slept all night, and wakefulness was not conducive to roses.

He had been gone about an hour, when Lizzie brought her a letter directed in the same writing as that which had once frightened her. She broke the seal and read:—

"DEAR ISOLT,—You must meet me to-morrow—anywhere—all places are alike to me; but if you refuse I shall come to the house, which I guess you wouldn't like. Bring all the cash you can, as I am hard up. If you refuse it will be bad for you; and surely after so long an absence you are anxious to see your loving
"R."

CHAPTER III.

BRIAN VARCOE sat in his own room, an open letter before him. The writer had signed himself "a friend," and the letter concerned Isolt.

On ordinary occasions the young man would have laughed scornfully, and torn the paper in a hundred pieces, because he knew anonymous epistles are usually the shelter of sneaks and liars—the devil's own instruments.

But there had been much that was strange in Miss Herne's conduct since the night when she had seen the face at the window. Once or twice Brian had met her quite late in the evening coming from the Berrydown meadows, which formed a part of his rival's estate.

She always said she had been on the cliffs, and stayed longer than she intended; but her manner had been so agitated, her face so white and frightened, that Brian's suspicions were aroused.

He sat looking at the ominous lines.

"It seems a mean thing to play the spy upon a girl, but my love must be my excuse; and if I prove her true and pure—as I believe her—why, then, I will confess all to her, and win her pardon."

He shook his clenched hand at the innocent paper.

"By Heaven! if it is a lie somebody shall wish he had never been born!"

This was the substance of the note:—

"If Mr. Varcoe will walk to the Berrydown Cliffs on Friday night he will see something that will astonish him, and shake his faith in women. Miss Herne—the immaculate and 'eccentric Miss Herne'—is in the habit of

meeting a lover there every other evening at 8.30. The way is lonely, the passers-by are few, and the trees afford ample shelter for the fond pair from the eye of any curious intruder. If the lover were presentable, or in any way a man, he would not compromise the young lady's good name by these clandestine meetings; and if Mr. Varcoe would be happy in his wife let him pay some attention to the warning of
"A FRIEND."

It was Wednesday night. Would that the morrow were Friday! Once Brian started up, resolved to seek an explanation from Isolt; but prudence restrained him, and he spent that evening alone.

But the following day he crossed to "number three," and found the girl very busy, but looking pale and ill. The part he had set himself to play was loathsome to him, and he would find a way out of it if possible. So he sat down by Isolt.

"I've a proposition to make and a favour to ask."

She turned her weary white face towards him, and smiled faintly.

"I would say the first is carried and the second granted, but that I know how exorbitant your demands are, Mr. Varcoe!"

"That is unkind, especially as I can deny each of the soft imputations. My proposal is that we shall all take a holiday to-morrow evening; the favour I ask—that you, with Gilbert, will let me scull you as far as Nettle-fold. It is only a three-mile trip, you know."

For just a moment Isolt's face flushed with pleasure, then it grew pale again, and a strange expression—half of fear, half of entreaty—came into her eyes. "I should like it, above all things," tremulously. "but I am unable to accept your offer. Gilbert, however, will gladly accompany you."

The suspicion and jealousy in Brian's heart began to take tangible form. "Will you tell me, Miss Herne, why you cannot go?"—his voice was hard, and the line of his lips very firm—almost cruel, Isolt thought.

"I—I have a prior engagement," she stammered, and his face grew darker. He was so honest, so candid himself, he hated anything like deceit in others. The girl saw his changed expression, and grew sick at heart.

"You must not think badly of me. By your face I know you are tempted to do so. I—I cannot help myself. Oh! Mr. Varcoe, at least do me the justice to believe I am not a free agent."

"You are going," he said in low, stern tones, "to keep an assignation? Who is this man, Isolt?"

"I cannot tell you," wringing her hands; "would to Heaven I could; the secret is killing me."

He interrupted her, swiftly,—

"Is he an old lover, to whom you have been false?—or is it Atherton, who is richer and better born than I? If an old lover, tell me. Upon my soul, Isolt, I am willing to overlook your past, if you will lay your hands in mine and tell me you have no cause for shame."

She broke into passionate weeping. "Don't ask anything of me; I dare not answer. One thing only will I say—it is true I have met a man secretly; and it is equally true I cannot help myself."

"You mean," icily, "you are in his power. Will you tell me the nature of that power, or is it presumption in me to ask? Perhaps I over-estimate the privileges of friendship."

She wrung her hands in her bitter anguish.

"Oh, spare me!" she cried; "if you knew all you would pity me. I am like the fly in a spider's web; I can neither turn nor free myself. Oh! for Heaven's sake, think as kindly of me as you can, for heart and courage alike are failing me."

"Isolt," he said, and his strong, true voice, that until now had only spoken tenderly to her, was harsh. "I have been vain enough to believe you were not indifferent to me; I have sometimes even ventured so far as to hope you loved me. That you are more to me than any other woman I frankly confess, but until this

mystery is cleared up I will not see you again of my own will, or hold any communication with you. My honour is so dear to me I dare not now offer you my name, lest it should suffer. But if at some future time you can make plain all that is now so strange in you; if—"

He broke off there, but suddenly resumed.

"Oh, Heaven! Why will you not speak and end our misery," and only her heavy sobs answered him; and she did not once glance at the dark, handsome face, so haggard and stricken. He crossed and stood beside her. "My dear," he said, and suddenly his deep voice grew tender, "tell me all. If it is some girlish folly that shadows your life I shall not be a hard judge; if you can assure me there is no blot upon your name I will believe your simple word and ask no proof."

She sank upon the couch, crying bitterly; his kindness was more than she could bear.

He knelt by her, took her pretty hands in his.

"Darling!" he whispered "give me the right to love and protect you."

And all in a moment she cried out,—

"Go away! oh! go away; you break my heart!"

But still he held her hands fast, and still his breath stirred the wavy masses of her beautiful hair. The touch of his hand, the sound of his voice, full of entreating love, made her very weak, and in that moment she forgot all reticence, all pride.

"If I did not love you so dearly it might be I should accept the gift you offer, and give you some false explanation of my grief. My misery is that, loving you, I dare not tell you anything of my story, for my own sake. Your anger is hard to bear, but your scorn would kill me."

Still he pleaded, as he knelt beside her,—

"Is there anything save actual and personal shame my love would not cancel? Love, love! am I so poor a creature you dare not trust me? You have confessed I am dear to you. Oh! then, for your own sake, if not for mine, give me a lover's, a husband's rights."

At that she started up,—

"Go, go! There can never be any union between you and me; let the past be forgotten, and if in the future you can forgive the pain I have caused you I shall be glad—Heaven only knows how glad! I would like to keep your friendship, only for this—that friendship is impossible where love has been, and it may be that soon you will hate my very name. At least absolve me of any effort to win your heart—let me be blameless in this; and if—if it is not too hard a thing for you to do, I should be glad if you would not hold aloof from Gilbert; he is lonely. You understand him. For his sake, and—perhaps for mine—do not quite forget what has been fair and good, if only for a little while."

As her voice died out wailingly Brian rose; his soul was heavy with her guilt, and his voice was so low, so strained, she hardly caught his words.

"You ask impossible things. I could not bear daily to meet you, knowing what has passed between us, and how vain all has been. If you had only warned me early—as you women so well understand doing—if you had only given me the slightest hint of this absent and not-to-be-seen lover, I would have held aloof, being well aware of my danger. Was it for gratification of your beauty you first suffered me to love you? Do you not realise that men's lives have been wrecked again and again to gratify a woman's caprice—a woman's unsatiable desire for conquest? But you—you who seemed so far removed from folly and coquetry, you for whom I thought nothing too high, nothing too holy; how could you do this thing, and kill my faith in good women? Oh, Heaven! when I think what you have been to me, what you are—"

"Don't think," she cried, her voice grown shrill with pain; "to think is madness. Have I not spent whole nights in thought and weeping, and has it availed me anything? Whatever I am, or whatever the circumstances of

my life may make me, hear me speak honestly; candidly. Perhaps it is the last time I shall ever open my mind to you; perhaps we may never speak together thus, alone, face to face, again. With my whole soul I love you, and my passion is the one good thing in a life all shame and grief. If by giving up the joy that may remain to me I could secure your happiness I should be above all women blest and glad. Now!"—with gentle hands putting him away—"now leave me, I have no further control over myself. Go—go—go! Oh, Brian! my love! my love!" and covered her miserable eyes; and when he would not leave her said, in tremulous tones, "there is an obstacle between us no love, no faith, can remove; there is a stain upon my name so black you would shudder at the thought of marrying me if you knew all."

And then he rose,—

"Is this man your husband?"

"No," she answered, and laughed shrilly.

"Thank Heaven, I am spared that anguish."

Her face wore a strange look, with the awful fear in his heart, each moment growing greater, said,—

"This is very dreadful; I did not think I should live to hear you exult in your shame."

The hot colour flushed her face, and her eyes blazed. She seemed about to speak, but the words died on her trembling lips, and he had moved to the door. Here he stood one moment, and she crept, sobbing, to his side. "Brian," she whispered, "I am not guilty so—not in the awful way you think; and would have touched him, only he drew back. 'Won't you say good-bye?' she implored 'won't you accord a little mercy to one whose life is all pain? Do you know you have never kissed me? kiss me now; and then—and then—we will part for ever, or meet only as casual acquaintances!'"

Oh! how his heart yearned towards her, how his love almost overcame his wisdom and his pride. In that moment all harshness left his face and voice; he only felt that she was dearer to him than aught else the world could give. He threw his arms about her and strained her to him; he kissed her hair, her brow, her lips; and she! oh! the poor girl! she clung to him as if she defied even death to part them; clasped her slim, white hands about his neck, and showed him plainly in that hour all that he was to her.

They could not speak, for speech was lost in feeling; they only knew they loved, and "that loving they must part." The slow minutes wore on, the clock upon the mantel gave out the hour, they neither heard nor heeded; outside the sun was shining in all its glory; the bees were deep in the hearts of the flowers; the sultry air was heavy with the perfume of heliotrope, magnolia, and rose; the birds kept up a ceaseless conversation among the trees, and high up in the deep blue heavens, so high that he could scarce be distinguished, a lark carolled out a happy song. Away and away stretched green meadows and undulating corn-fields; here and there the Berrydown cliffs with their swarms of gulls, showed white against green pasture and blue sky. But what were all these things to them? From the far distance came the strange "brool" of the sea upon the little shingly beach, and in the street children's voices laughed and chattered, until at last they roused Isolt from her stupor.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried in terrible tones, "if I could be a child again! a little child, whose life is laughter and love!" and then she clung convulsively to Brian, "My dear!" how faint her voice had grown, "my dear, you must leave me now; if we linger the whole day over our parting, it will come with the evening. There is no help for us, oh! my heart! no help! Do kiss me and say good-bye."

She lifted her lips to his, and his face was drawn and ghastly. He dared not trust himself to speak; he only laid his lips to hers, and kissed her once; then unclasping her hands from about his neck he went out, leaving her lonely, and staggered like a drunken man across to his lodgings.

And she!—oh! pity her! pity her! as she writhed and moaned in her anguish. She had locked her door and drawn her blinds, and now she lay prostrate upon the floor, with hidden face, and arms flung wide above her head. She had no word to say, her woe had made her dumb, but there was an awful cry in her heart, a passionate prayer, that surely was as real as any spoken petition. Once, when the lark's song drew nearer and swelled out jubilantly, loudly, she lifted her wan face, and in her eyes there was a wonder that nature did not share her grief—a sort of questioning horror that any creature could be glad.

Then the pretty head sank low again, and the wavy masses of hair fell unbound, and lay upon the bright roses in the carpet, flooded her shoulders, rippling in all their profusion below the slender waist. The nails pierced her delicate palms, but she felt no physical pain; if one had struck her she scarce had heeded it. Suddenly she sat erect, and in that moment found voice to cry aloud,—

"Heaven forgive him! for I never can! I never can! Oh, my broken heart! my ruined life! Oh, Heaven! oh, Heaven!"

What hour was it? Mechanically she looked towards the clock; it was almost time for Gilbert's return. She rose, drew up the blinds, not daring to look towards Brian's windows; then, unlocking the door, went to her room, and did her poor best to remove all traces of tears and agitation. She coiled the wavy masses of her hair low down upon her neck, and drew the little rings of hair lower upon her brow; she put on her prettiest dress, which had in it the faintest suggestion of pink, and so cast a slight tinge of colour over her pallid face; and then she went down to meet Gilbert, trying to smile, only the poor lips refused to do her will, and the eyes would not be party even to such an innocent deception as she planned. The brother took the small white face between his hands,—

"Dear, what has happened?"

She was silent for a moment while she struggled with her tears; then she said,—

"It is only a fresh chapter in the story, Gilbert; I have denied myself again and again. I have tried to do my duty; oh! how cruel a duty it is! To-day Mr. Varcoe has asked me to marry him—and—oh! you know what my answer was. And in sending him away I have spoiled my whole life, and given up every chance of happiness. My poor Gilbert! I should not complain; your lot is as hard as my own! Like one in an ancient story I could say, 'Come let us weep together,' only tears and prayers are no avail," bitterly.

"Poor little woman!" gently, "did Brian Varcoe ask the reason of your refusal?"

"He asked many questions, and I could not answer them clearly, so that he believes hard things of me. Now, my dear, my dear, you must be, if possible, kinder than ever to me, because there is none to love me but you." She laid her aching head upon his shoulder, and clung about him almost piteously. "Gilbert," she murmured, in a monotonous tone, "I wonder what will be the end of it all!—if we shall travel through life together, always miserable, always under a cloud. Should one of us die before the other, what will the survivor do?"—then, at the added melancholy on his face, she roused herself to a semblance of brightness.

"After all, Gilbert, things might be infinitely worse; we might have to bear poverty as well as disgrace; or we might have to suffer separation—and that would be insupportable."

He leaned forward, and spoke in a whisper. "Isolt, do you think he will come to us here?"

Just a quivering of her eyelids, just a tremor of the lips, and she answered, slowly,—

"We will hope not. Perhaps, dear, if he is sufficiently bribed he will not trouble us; and trust me I will spare you, if I can, the misery of meeting him again—poor, poor Gilbert!"

That evening Isolt dressed herself in the quietest of clothing, and went out towards the Berrydown Cliffs. It had been in Brian's mind to follow her and see who was this man who had such an influence over her life, more with a view to shield her from his power than for his own gratification; but honour restrained him.

Denis Atherton was of another nature. Seeing Isolt cross the meadows at dusk, he had grown curious and followed her at a distance. He saw her meet a tall, dark stranger; he stooped behind the bushes and heard much that passed between them, and told himself that whatever secret was between them the girl did not love him. If she had done so in the past what was that to him, and a man of his nature might easily be bought off if only Isolt would listen to his (Atherton's) proposals.

He longed to catch a glimpse of the man's face, but as yet had failed. One thing he had learned, that Isolt met her strange companion every other night, and always brought him provisions of some sort, and a small packet which seemed like money, and that he invariably grumbled as he counted it. He determined to be first at the meeting-place, and on this particular night had the satisfaction of listening to the stranger's awful oaths as he waited for Isolt's arrival. She was somewhat late and when she confronted the man, her face was white and sterner than Denis had ever seen it.

"You're late, young lady. What the deuce do you mean by keeping me here so long?"

"You should be thankful I have come at all, Redmond; it was in my mind not to meet you any more."

He interrupted her with a coarse laugh,—"But second thoughts were best, my pretty Isolt. You would hardly care for your fine lovers to hear a certain story. It's true I shouldn't figure very well in the narrative, but that's a minor consideration. By Heaven, if you don't do as I wish I'll lay your pretty head in the dust."

Denis stirred, and could scarcely check the impulse to rush out and punish the ruffian who dared threaten the girl he loved.

"Hush!" she said, in a whisper, "what was that noise?"

"A rabbit or hare passing; what a nervous fool you are! But what have you brought me to-night?"

"Not very much; you have had money in large quantities since you came here; all my savings have gone to supply your wants—I will not draw upon Gilbert."

"You talk of your petty savings as if they were thousands," roughly, and he counted over the silver she had brought discontentedly. "Fifteen-and-sixpence all told," he said, with an oath. "What is a fellow to do with that?"

"I'm sure I don't know," in a hard voice, "and I don't care. You are better clothed, housed, and fed, than you have been for five years. If you had received them things whilst in—"

"Hold your tongue," the man almost shouted, whilst Isolt regarded him with scornful eyes.

"What have you done with all the money I have brought you? How have you spent it all?"

"In cards, and dice, and wine, my lass, and I might add billiards, but as it used to be, my luck is still against me. I have hovered about Westerton until I'm sick of the beastly hole, and wish I could see my way clear of it. For five hundred down I'd go and never trouble you again."

"Oh!" Isolt said, passionately. "I wish I had the modest sum you demand! If it were double the amount you should have it, if so I could rid my life of you for ever."

"Thank you; what an affectionate child it is!" Pon my word, Isolt, your love overwhelms me."

"If you have nothing to offer but coarse jests I had best leave you," contemptuously.

"If you have anything to say, say it quickly; it is getting late, and Gilbert will wonder where I am, and probably seek me."

"Pretty innocent! must it never be trusted alone?" then suddenly changing his tone, "look here, my girl, I want more money; I have debts of honour to pay."

She laughed out shrilly. "That is the best joke you have made, Redmond; pray repeat it."

Even in that dim light she saw his face grow ghastly with rage, and shook his clenched hands threateningly before her eyes. She did not flinch; she met his evil look steadily and said,—

"Do your worst, you cannot make me more unhappy than I am, and death would be a blessing."

"I can blacken your character to Denis Atherton, and I will, even at the expense of my own."

"I know," she answered quietly, "you would stoop to any lie; but what Mr. Atherton believes would not affect me."

The listener grew angry, and wondered in his heart why Isolt was so cold to him.

"I can even go to Brian Varcoe—you see I know all the gossip of the town—I will tell him—"

"Oh! no—no!" she shrieked; "tell him nothing! I will do anything you ask, be anything, only keep our shame from him! Surely, surely you would not expose your own crime?"

He laughed, but Denis bit his lip in impotent wrath.

"Did she love Varcoe? If so, what then?"

"My dear child, you have shown your hand plainly—too plainly. You love this Varcoe—are fool enough to prefer a penniless land-surveyor to a gentleman of high birth and great fortune. There! a truce to nonsense. If you do not bring me ten pounds by to-morrow I will let all the town know the tie between us. Wherever you go for refuge I will follow, whatever friends you make I will steal from you, poison their minds, prove to them I am an ill-used man, and you—ah! you tremble and are afraid. Will you bring the money, or will you risk exposure? Yes or no? I don't want to stay on these confounded cliffs all night."

"I cannot bring you more than I have done. I have tried to spare Gilbert, hoping vainly in the end I should touch your heart. Oh! pardon, I forgot you had one only in an anatomical sense! I have failed, and now, Heaven help us—we are too feeble to stand against you."

"Right, my dear! 'Pon my word you're coming to your senses." And Denis wondered where he had heard that voice.

Over the cliffs sounded a merry whistle, but none of the trio heard it, and Jo passed on his way muttering to himself, "What am de massa doin', stooping down dare? An' sure dat is missy Isolt;" and he went on puzzled and a little troubled in his mind.

Denis rose from his crouching position. He felt the interview was drawing to a close, and it was more politic to move to a distance. He heard Redmond say, "Then you will give me no more!" and the answer, "I cannot," and said to himself, "I alone can help her; she will be my wife yet."

Isolt lingered a little longer with her companion.

"Tell me," she said "what you intend doing?"

"I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed," he retorted, with his mocking laugh. "For the present I intend locating myself at number three, Cliff-terrace, where I am sure of a cordial welcome."

"Oh! spare us that," she cried; "at least let us live respected by our fellow-townsmen. Your intemperate habits, your disregard of all social decency, will bring us to open shame. Surely I have done enough for you to win this favour?"

But the man's sinister face grew obstinate, and Isolt turned from him with repugnance and despair.

"I am going," she said, in a low voice; "do not follow me."

"Haven't the least intention of doing so; I'm going to the 'Jolly Tars,' a pretty place, my dear, at Berrydown."

Without a word she left him, his mocking good-bye sounding in her ears. It was nearly dark and she went quickly, being afraid. A little way on she met Denis.

"You are out late?" he said, "may I take you home?" And she was glad of his escort, being nervous.

"Have you been to Berrydown, Miss Isolt?" he questioned. And she answered, blushing at the lie,—

"Yes. I walked farther than I intended. I wished to be home before it was dark, as Gilbert will be anxious about me."

He wanted to try the effect of an experiment upon her, so he asked suddenly,—

"Did you see a strange man in the village?" In the darkness he could not see her awful pallor, and her voice was steady as she answered,—

"No; and even had I done so, how should I tell him from a native?"

Full of admiration of her courage, and yet bent on confounding her if possible, he went on,—

"Partly because he wears broadcloth, and partly from his freedom from dialectic speech. He is a roysterer, a gambler, and a drunkard, and yet, inconceivable as it may appear, it is said a young and pretty girl meets him frequently upon the cliffs."

Just the faintest tremor ran through her tones as she said,—

"Poor, unhappy girl! she is to be pitied."

"She ought to be warned that the meetings are known, and told of the man's unworthy character."

"Probably she knows it already. I suppose the conclusion you and all others draw is that this stranger is her lover, Mr. Atherton?"

"Is or was for some motive of his own. Such a wretch would not understand the meaning of love; such a man would be quite outside the pale of human feeling, dead to all honourable instincts."

"You are right," she said with sudden passion, "his death would be a mercy to all his friends."

"If she loved him once she does not now," Denis thought triumphantly, and then spoke of indifferent things. At last they reached her home, and at the little gate she paused, and giving him her hand, said quietly,—

"I will not ask you in to-night, for I am very tired and quite incapable of entertaining you; many thanks for your escort—good-night."

He held the little hand closely.

"May I come to-morrow? Since I have been forbidden the house life has been very miserable to me. Only say yes, Isolt, and I will do my best not to offend you again."

Just a moment she hesitated, then quietly,—

"Come if you choose, but pay your visits in the evening, because my days are very busy, and Gilbert will be glad of a companion. I am sometimes a very poor one."

His next speech seemed irrelevant.

"You are not looking well, Isolt?" with unveiled tenderness.

"Oh, I am very well, but I have walked too far;" then she went in, determining that come what would, she would meet Redmond no more; at least she owed it to herself to keep her name from scandal.

On Sunday she was so very far from well that she did not go out, and Gilbert attended evening service alone. As soon as it was ended he hurried home, feeling a little anxious about Isolt; he took a short cut, and very quickly reached Cliff-terrace. His hand was on the gate, and he was about to enter, when somebody struck him sharply upon the shoulder, and a voice he knew too well cried,—

"What! too proud to speak to an old friend?"

Sick and faint he turned to see the speaker, and cried out sharply,—

"You! you! but I knew you would come at last. Oh Heaven! what do you want of me?"

"That's a pretty welcome," laughing harshly; "in the parable the prodigal was received with open arms."

"He was penitent," sharply. "Now tell me what you want, and let me rid myself of you, now and for ever."

"What I want is a home, and I mean to have it with you; whilst you're away I shall be a pleasant companion for our dear Isolt. If you refuse what I ask you shall be sorry for it. I will send anonymous letters about the place, which will cause the pious people of Westerton to avoid you as if you had the plague, whilst I, from a distant place, shall hug myself in my security."

"Would you be so base as to blazon your guilt—to tell the miserable story of your wasted life?"

"What matters? None will know me, whilst I shall have ruined you. Revenge is sweet, my boy."

"Oh Heaven!" the other cried, "how can I take you to Isolt—how let you breathe the same air with her? Poor child, poor child, poor, unhappy girl! See here, Bedad, and I will starve myself to supply your wants; I will work night and day, if only you will promise to leave Westerton and never return or molest us any more. You have broken your word often, but I will believe you now. I will give you one last chance to redeem your character—I will endeavour to get you some employment."

"Oh, thank you!" scornfully. "I want no employment; when I am in luck cards furnish me with a good income. Just at present I am unfortunate; now let us go in."

Gilbert's lips quivered a moment; he was not a strong man, but he urged,—

"Let her remain in ignorance she has suffered enough already. You broke our father's heart—be merciful to her."

"It seems to me we are playing at cross-purposes. Isolt knows I am in the neighbourhood; she has met me night after night, brought me money, clothed me—how else could I present the appearance I do? She wished to keep us apart, but my affection has overcome my prudence, and here I am."

"Come in," and Gilbert groaned as he led the way into the house Isolt had made so dainty that it was the envy of all the neighbours. The girl, lying upon the couch, heard footsteps in the hall, and one struck terror to her heart. She knew it well, and knew, too, that it brought no joy to any place it entered, that sorrow and shame were always its attendants. She rose and moved towards the table, steadying herself as best she could; then the door opened and Gilbert entered, followed by a dark and sinister-looking man.

"My dear!" the former began, and, moaning, Isolt crept to him, laid her head on his breast, and said,—

"It has come at last, Gilbert. I tried to spare you; but he is strong—I so weak—I without craft, he so learned in all cunning—"

The man interrupted,—

"You are very complimentary, my dear; if you were wise you would conciliate me."

"And why?" cried Isolt, flashing upon him suddenly; "what have you done that we should be glad to see or welcome you again? You broke my father's heart by your brutality and crime; you dragged us lower and lower by your extravagance and sin; you crushed Gilbert's spirit, ruined his life, blighted his hopes; you changed me from a happy girl to a miserable, timid woman—you have taken all hope, all honour, all love and joy from us—are you content?"

"Silence!" he shouted; "if you were not a fool you would know better than to anger me."

"Be silent! Yes, I will, when I have spoken what is in my heart (still she clung to Gilbert).

Soon or late you will meet your punishment, and of all you have known there will be none to pity you—there is scarcely a creature who believed in you that you have not deceived and wronged. Oh! Heaven, that we must endure your presence daily—that I should pray to have you removed from us—should rejoice in your death! No," as he stepped forward, "don't threaten us, don't attempt any violence, or I will expose you publicly, although your shame should become ours."

He laughed uncomfortably, whilst his restless, light eyes wandered round the room, taking in every detail of furniture and ornaments. Then he said,—

"Now look here, Isolt, you've had your say, let me have mine. Five years I've suffered hardships you can't understand, and all the while you have lived in luxury; it's my turn now, and you had best treat me with tolerable courtesy; whatever our private life may be we won't quarrel in public. Now I'll take supper, I'm frightfully hungry."

Isolt returned to the couch, but though Gilbert took his place at the table he ate nothing, and there was a wretched silence. But at last he spoke,—

"I will not have Isolt insulted or bullied, and remember I hold a responsible position; do not endanger it by any vice or madness of yours; the first time you transgress you leave this house."

Late that night the visitor stumbled upstairs to the pretty room prepared hastily for him. Then brother and sister, as moved by a common impulse, moved nearer to each other, and Gilbert drew the pretty, dark head upon his bosom,—

"My girl, my poor girl!" "Don't grieve for me," she said, gently; "your lot is worse than mine," and clung about him, sobbing bitterly, yet trying for his sake to be calm. The storm that had threatened them so long had broken upon them at last.

(To be concluded in our next.)

FACETIE.

"WHAT are pauses?" asked the teacher of the first class. "Things that grow on cats," piped the small boy at the foot.

"WHEN were the pyramids of Egypt discovered?" asked the teacher. "In the Middle Ages," replied the scholar at the foot of the class. "What do you mean by the Middle Ages?" further questioned the pedagogue. "Why, the pyramidal ages."

"A SCIENTIFIC man says that the way to sleep is to think of nothing," read Mrs. Smith in a newspaper. "If that be true, I should say that you would sleep all the time, my dear," said her husband. "No doubt, Mr. Smith, for I think a great deal of you."

ABSTRACTS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Not to go to bed when you are sleepy because it is not a certain hour.

To stand in water up to your knees fishing for trout when you can buy them in a clean, dry market.

People of exquisite sensibility, who cannot bear to see an animal put to death, showing the utmost attention to the variety and abundance of their tables.

The heir of an avaricious uncle paying him the compliment of the deepest mourning.

The lovely widow of a cross old man wearing weeds; and the survivor of a rich old shrew being particular in the choice and display of his weepers.

To buy a horse from a near relation, and believe every word he says in praise of the animal he is desirous to dispose of.

To call a man hospitable who indulges his vanity by displaying his service of plate to his rich neighbours frequently, but was never known to give a dinner to any one really in want of it.

A NATURALIST says that the sponge of commerce has a nervous system and secreted gall. The social sponge has also considerable nerve, and his gall is immense.

NEARLY one-half of the sailing ships of the world bear the names of women. Sailing ships are charming sights in fair weather, but utterly unmanageable in a storm.

WE agree with a recent writer that "it's all nonsense to say that eating pies is unhealthy." It is trying to digest them that raises the mischief with one's health.

THE acquaintance of the female mind with the mysteries of commerce and finance is extensive and paralyzing. "Why," said a well-to-do young woman, who had just received a draper's bill, "why do they keep on sending me this? I know well enough I got the things last summer, so what's the use of reminding me of it?"

YOUNG MEN, make friends of the girls. It is related that the day before a recent bank failure two young ladies, relatives of the bank officials, went to the young men in whose hearts they had planted the sweet bulbs of affection, and advised them to draw out their deposits. The young men heeded the warning to their profit.

At a Dublin Mansion House dinner one of the livery servants went up to a gentleman who was carving a joint of beef, and said, "I'll trouble ye, if ye please, for a slice for me master." "Certainly. How does your master like it?" "Bedad!" cried the varlet; "how can I tell ye how he loikes it until he has tasted a bit?"

PROFESSIONAL REPARTÉE.—A lawyer and a physician were passing a cemetery. "I suppose, doctor," remarked the lawyer, jocosely, "that many of your cases are lying there." "Undoubtedly," the doctor replied, "And," pointing to a goal in the distance, "I suppose that many of your cases are lying there."

YOUNG MAN: "Have I your consent, sir, to pay my addresses to your daughter?" OLD MAN: "Which daughter? I have four." YOUNG MAN: "Well—er—the youngest I would like to try first, sir; but, in case she should refuse me, would you—er—be willing that I should continue on up?"

"WHAT's that man doing there, waving that little stick?" said a countryman, who was at the theatre for the first time. "That is the leader of the orchestra," replied his city cousin. "The leader! Oh, yes. As a musician I suppose, he beats all the others." "No, he beats time."

"DOSH't you know it is very wrong to smoke, my boy?" said an old lady to a youngster who persisted in puffing a cheap cigar. "Oh! I smoke for my health," answered the boy, saucily. "But you never heard of a cure by smoking," she continued, presently. "Oh! yes I have," persisted the boy, blowing a big cloud; "that's the way they cure pigs." "Smoke on, then," quickly replied the old lady; "there's some hope for you yet."

"WHAT did the sparrow do yesterday?" asks a poetess. Well, dear, we think he followed out his usual scheme, which is to—get up at 4 A.M., hop around in the gutters, quarrel with his neighbours, dig bait, not for fishing, but for amusement; take a bath in the puddle, quarrel the rest of the day, and retire at about 6 P.M. If you have any more curiosity as to what he did you will have to apply somewhere else, as this is all the information we can give you."

"Isn't it a grand sight?" exclaimed an enthusiastic member of the Press Rifle Club, as the boys were peppering away at their beautiful painted target. "Very pretty," assented a stranger. "It reminds me of a Girtton College commencement I once attended." "Strange," muttered the journalist, suspiciously; "why does our shoot remind you of a Girtton commencement?" "It is such a beautiful collection of misses," replied the stranger, dodging into a back street.

SOCIETY.

THE GRAND DUKE OF HESSE, with some members of his family, are shortly expected on a visit to Her Majesty. His Royal Highness will be one of the guests at the marriage of the Princess Beatrice, which takes place during the season at Osborne.

THE return of Lord Arthur Somerset to Badminton from the Sudan a few days ago, after having been severely wounded at Abu Klea, was made an occasion of great rejoicing. Although Lord Arthur desired that no public welcome should be accorded him, as he was of opinion that the Sudan campaign was not a matter in connection with which there should be any rejoicings, still the villagers at Badminton and the tenantry of the district were determined to show his lordship in what universal respect he was held; so they decided to hold a village *fete*, consisting of a series of athletic sports and a display of fireworks; and the Duke of Beaufort kindly consented that these should be held in the porch immediately in front of Badminton House. About 300 of the villagers were assembled at Acton Turville, where the Badminton and Dodington troops of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars were drawn up to form a guard of honour, and surrounded the carriage, in which sat the hero of the day, the Duchess of Beaufort, the Marchioness of Waterford, and Lord Tyrone. Amidst the pealing of bells, waving of handkerchiefs, and loud cheering Lord Arthur thanked the assemblage for the hearty welcome they had accorded him.

PRINCE HENRY OF BATTENBERG is to be honorary colonel of the Isle of Wight Volunteers. His acceptance of this position was lately communicated to the detachment by Major Forrest, who said he hoped the battalion would turn out smart and well, to act as guard of honour at the forthcoming wedding.

THE DUCHESS OF ALBANY, accompanied by her two children, after paying a short visit to Her Majesty at Windsor, embarked on Monday at Port Victoria on board the Royal yacht *Osborne*, for Flushing, whence she proceeded by train to visit her parents at Arolsen.

THE PRINCESS LOUISE has promised to open a bazaar (the date of which is not yet fixed) in aid of the Princess Louise Home at Wandstead, the object of which is to rescue and educate young girls whose forlorn position exposes them to cruel temptations.

THE marriage of Effie Josephine, second daughter of the celebrated sculptor, Mr. J. E. Boehm, with Mr. Conrad Herapath, of Westwood, East Kent, took place on the 29th ult. The bride's dress was of rich white silk, trimmed with orange blossoms. The seven bridesmaids were attired in cream French canvas, trimmed with flounces of coffee lace, with green velvet collars and cuffs; their high French hats were turned up with the same coloured velvet, and trimmed with white silk and silver wings. Each wore a gold brooch, on which was a pearl horsehoe, presented by the bridegroom.

A VERY fashionable wedding was that of Penelope Louise, second daughter of Mr. J. Phipps Townshend, whose marriage with Mr. Harry Eyres, Her Britannic Majesty's vice-consul at Van, Armenia, was solemnized on the 29th ult. The bridal dress was of white satin and lace, the train of which was borne by a nephew of the bridegroom in a costume of the 17th century. The five bridesmaids' dresses were composed of cream-coloured Nagpore silk, with gold and green embroidery, and broad felt hats with plumes to correspond. The bridegroom's gift to these young ladies was a brooch with the monograms of the contracting parties.

A DUBLIN paper states that it is in contemplation to purchase Ardbraccan Palace, Navan, as an Irish residence for Prince Albert Victor. The palace is capably situated for hunting and salmon fishing, and has extensive stables and kennels.

STATISTICS.

THE completion of the Mackay-Bennett cable makes the total length of submarine cable, according to the *Electrician*, about 68,000 miles. Each cable contains an average of forty strands of wire, so that altogether there are over two and a-half million miles of wire used in their construction, or ten times the distance from the earth to the moon.

THE number of non-working holidays in France, including Sundays, amounts to 100 whole days in each year. In Greece they have 100 days; in England there are 84; in Russia, 66; in Brussels, 65. In the United States it varies in different States; but few, if any, have more than seven or eight legal holidays in the year in addition to the Sundays.

MOHAMMEDANS.—It is estimated that there are 200,000,000 Mohammedans in the world, of whom 6,000,000 are in south-eastern Europe and 20,000,000 in Asiatic Turkey, 7,500,000 in Persia, 25,000,000 in Arabia and Central Asia, and 60,000,000 in Hindostan. Considerably more than half of them are in Asia, and the remainder in Africa, except the 6,000,000 in European Turkey. It is also stated that Islam is rapidly converting the followers of Brahminism.

GEMS.

If the keynote of all our conduct to others had its spring in a fine self-reverence, there would be no discourtesies.

THERE is in all of us an impediment to perfect happiness; namely, weariness of the things which we possess and a desire for the things that we have not.

FOR every life there is a summit. Happy are they who gain it, and sad the lot of those who faint and fall in the struggle. Short or long to the top, it can only be scaled by persistent climbing. There must be ambition to do and dare or the prize will not be secured.

NO article of furniture should be put into a room that will not stand sunlight, for every room in a dwelling should have the windows so arranged that some time during the day a flood of sunlight will force itself into the apartments.

IT is the infirmity of little minds to be taken with every appearance and dazzled with everything that sparkles; but great minds have but little admiration, because few things appear new to them.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MACKEREL HASH.—Freshen a salt mackerel over night, and in the morning boil and remove the bones, picking it into small pieces. Have ready some fresh mashed potatoes; stir fish and potatoes together, seasoning with cream, butter, salt and pepper, but not too moist.

COCONUT JUMBLES.—One cup of butter, two of sugar, two and a-half of flour, two eggs, one grated cocoonut; cream the butter and sugar together, add the flour gradually, beat the eggs very light, and add, lastly, the cocoonut. Drop from a knife or spoon, and bake in a quick oven.

PLAIN DARK CAKE.—One and one-half cups of sugar, two spoonfuls of treacle, one cup of butter, one half-cup of sour milk, one teaspoonful of soda, two eggs, two and one-half cups of flour, a little of all kinds of spices, currants, and raisins.

SPONGE CAKE MOULD.—In half a pint of cream soak as many sponge cakes as it will moisten; beat them up with a fork. Whisk two eggs and the yolks of six, with a table-spoonful of vanilla sugar, to a foam; stir all together. Add the snow of four egg whites, stirred gently in; steam it in a buttered mould, and serve with chocolate sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

KEENNESS in a man is not always to be taken as a sign of capacity, for it is generally observed most in those who are selfish and over-reaching; and his keenness generally ends in that kind of penetration into other people's interests which will tend to benefit his own.

EVERY human soul has a germ of some flowers within; and they would open if they could only find sunshine and free air to expand it. It has often been said that not having enough sunshine was what ailed the world. Make the people happy and there will not be half the quarrelling or a tenth part of the wickedness there is.

NATURAL WINES.—A new distinguished characteristic has been discovered by Dr. Egger between natural wines and those fabricated with the addition of water. Pure natural wines contain three inorganic acids, the phosphoric, sulphuric and silicic acids, but no nitric acid. As the water used in sophisticating wines is almost exclusively taken from pump-wells contaminated with the impurities of the adjoining soil, admixture of water may be inferred if the wine contains any nitric acid.

PROTECTION OF THEATRES.—The last invention for the protection of theatre audiences is a "penetrable safety wall," which has just been patented by an engineer at Kottbus, Germany. The plan is to make the interior walls, in all parts of the theatre, of papier mache, made after a certain method. Such a wall will have the appearance of massive stone; but by pressure upon certain parts, where the words are to be painted in luminous letters—"To be broken open in case of fire"—access to the exterior corridors is to be obtained, whence escape to the outer air can be made.

TO overcome evil with good is the most glorious of all virtues; it is the most beneficial also, because this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal succession of injuries and retaliations—for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for satisfaction. Would we but observe this salutary precept—to love our enemies and to do good to those who despitefully use us—this obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate hearts, and we should have no enemies to forgive.

THE LITTLE THINGS OF LIFE.—It is often easier to make great sacrifices than little ones, to right some great wrong than to prevent a multitude of small ones. It is easier to do battle for a grand idea than to give up a prejudice, to establish a man's right to citizenship than to respect in silence his right to dress as he pleases. Yet it is the little things of life that contribute most largely to its fret and worry, or to its peace and gladness; and he who possesses the true spirit of conciliation knows that no right is too small to be respected, no kindness too trifling to be rendered, no part of life too insignificant to command consideration.

A NUISANCE.—A woman who has no home duties, or who does not attend to such duties, is a pest to her acquaintances. It may take her a long time to make her breakfast-tablet, but her outside garments go on like magic when she has once decided to make a morning or afternoon call. She will not work, and she will not let her neighbours work. Her acquaintances are kept in a state of chronic discomfort in the expectation of a visit, and a door-bell in her vicinity cannot ring without striking terror to the heart of the lady of the house. A call from this idle person means simply loss of time without the slightest compensation. The work in the kitchen or the nursery must be abandoned; and this means, with practical, conscientious housekeepers, not only a giving up of the work for the time, but some time yet to come. The work planned for that day and omitted for that day means overwork at another time, confusion, and anxiety.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

WOODLAND DAISY.—The hair is flaxen.

N. N.—There is not a word of truth in the assertion.

R. H.—The nobleman named is single still.

K. L. M.—Let the matter rest; it will be by far the happier plan.

PAMEY BLOSSOM.—Your best plan is to frankly own your mistake to your friend when next you see him.

A. C. B.—Consult a solicitor, who, with all the facts before him, will be able to advise.

LAURA B.—There is no law against it, but you had better not proceed in the course named.

C. L. C.—Canrobert was the name of a French general in the Crimean War.

J. C. B.—The legacy duty will have to be paid whether the article has been sold or not.

A. M. M.—Let bygones be bygones, and you will have a much easier time of it.

G. G. B.—Take counsel of your mother, who will be your best friend and guide.

R. R. STATION.—The 29th April, 1887, was, we believe, the date required.

CONSTANT READER.—Please in future use some more distinctive signature. You must consult a respectable surgeon.

E. A. L.—A letter addressed simply Mr. R., Superintendent of the L— Industrial Schools, would doubtless find him.

H. M.—We are not aware of any licence being necessary, but write to the conservators of the River Lea, Hertford.

MINNIE B.—Vaccination is carried out so strictly in the Prussian army that not a soldier has died of small-pox since 1875.

D. W. B.—The right one has not come along yet. Do not marry until you can give your heart with your hand.

C. C. B.—Hydrogen peroxide might do it; that is probably the best bleaching agent that we have for any such use, but sunlight is the agent principally used heretofore.

L. V. T.—The carpenter's, mason's, shoemaker's, plumber's, tailor's, and jeweller's trades are the best. If you are strong and hardy, learn the carpenter's trade. It is the best in the country referred to.

C. C. H.—The only remedy is care and thoughtfulness and good society. Think before you speak. Read good books aloud. The novels of Thackeray and George Elliot will teach you a great deal.

JAMES M. T.—The best and cheapest promoter of the growth of the hair we know is a mixture of tincture of cantharides and sweet oil with a little rosemary. Any chemist will give you the right proportions.

B. W. W.—Endeavour to place yourself in a position to marry, and then press your suit with the young lady. It is foolish and idle to go a-courting before you are ready to marry.

M. C.—Prepared chalk, powdered charcoal, and orris root make a very good dentifrice. Use it about twice a week. Any chemist will prepare it for you at a small cost.

M. T. V.—Dry paper is a very good insulator of electricity. If wet, it of course becomes nearly as good a conductor as the fluid with which it is wet. Kept dry it is about as good as gutta serena.

D. J.—In asking an explanation of your friend's ill-humour, you did as much as was necessary. Still, if you are anxious to make it up with him, you can if you choose give him a cordial greeting whenever you meet him.

S. K. K.—An engagement should not be kept secret. The parents should be informed of it as soon as it is made. The gentleman should see the young lady's parents and ask their consent at once. Tell your parents all about it.

A. M. M.—Ask the lady to marry you. This is the best test of her sincerity. If she consents, go at once to her parents, and having their approval marry as soon as matters can be arranged. This course will solve all your doubts.

M. C. C.—Cruel and inhuman treatment by the husband of his wife will enable her to obtain a decree of judicial separation from him, and the court will at the same time award the custody of the children according to its judgment of what is best. But the husband's refusal to permit the wife to attend a church, of which she is a member, has been held not to be sufficient ground for a separation.

A. H. B.—According to historical authorities, collections of wild beasts were known in the earliest ages of civilisation. They were usually made by the kings and emperors, and the animals were exhibited in games and gladiatorial contests. The Roman conquerors and emperors excelled all others in the vastness of their collections of wild beasts, and the numbers that they sacrificed in the arena. In a spectacle exhibited by Pompey there were seventeen elephants, over five hundred lions, and four hundred and ten other African animals. Augustus gave twenty-six grand shows during his reign, in which it is said that three thousand and

five hundred wild beasts were slain. In the year 80 of the Christian era, the Emperor Titus gave a festival lasting one hundred days, and on one of the days no less than five thousand wild beasts were exhibited. The whole number of animals, wild and tame, killed during the festival, reached nine thousand. In those far-off times, wild beasts were much more plentiful than they are now, as they have been constantly diminishing for two thousand years. Hence, it was easier then to get large collections of them together than it is now.

CANISTER B.—The solder you refer to as being applied so easily is probably what is called bismuth solder, and is made of two parts of tin and one part each of lead and bismuth, by weight. It makes a very easy flowing solder.

SEWING.—The rain liberates the odours of plants by moistening their surface and opening their pores, the evaporation of the moisture carrying the odours with it. We know of no way to collect odours except by distillation from their natural sources.

C. J. B.—To remove freckles from the face without injury take sulpho-carbide of zinc, 2 parts; distilled glycerine, 25 parts; rose water, 25 parts; and scented alcohol, 5 parts; to be applied twice daily for from half-an-hour to an hour, and then washed off with cold water.

IN THE SPRING TIME.

In pearl and gold and almondine
Against the east is drawn,
Above you soaring mountain line,
The aureole of Dawn,
Blue colonnades of air disclose
Her windows kindling far,
And Morning, blushing like a rose,
Set all her doors ajar.

Across the desert solitudes

A warning whisper runs;
The impulse of the hills and woods
Toward the vernal suns;
A balmy east warms the dark breast
Of Earth, by flood and steep,
And Nature, thrilled with sweet unrest,
Smiles softly in her sleep.

Far off a joyous echo calls

From hol'ow glades and fells;
A sudden clash of waterfalls
Rings out like elfin bells;
An answering cry floats faintly by
In every still wind;
The sweet Spring tide is coming nigh
By pathways vague and blind.

She gropes in tangled ways, the frost
Had blotted from the world,
And lo!—the paths, all darkly crossed,
Burn with the daffodil's gold;
And still with wayward wandering,
By hills and lowlands bare,
The loitering footsteps of the Spring
Shine faintly here and there.

Among the withered reeds and ferns

The mallows dimly show;
The starwort's feeble taper burns
In nooks and hollows low;
Oh, love, the world is bleak and chill,
The skies are dark and drear,
But blow the rude winds as they will
The Spring tide now is here.

The lily lifts her silvery lamp

To light her on her way;
The crocus flings her casement damp
Wide open to the day;
Sweetheart, the Winter fleeth fast,
The hills begin to glow,
And green May-tide has come at last,
Howe'er the winds may blow.

A. A. T.

KATHIE.—Some electric bodies can be charged by stroking with a cat's skin or piece of silk, so that in a dry atmosphere they will retain their charge for some time. It has not been determined when the railway named will be commenced; probably as soon as the capital to build it is assured, and the act obtained for it.

CARRIE H.—We think that you should withdraw and not stand in the way of a suitor better prepared to marry. It is doing the young lady a great injury. You are too young to marry. Leave the young lady her freedom. If she is single when you come of age and possess a larger income, you can then press your suit.

L. D. F.—In order to use the words correctly to which you refer you must learn the facts concerning them. The verb *lay* is a transitive verb. Its past tense and perfect participle is *laid*, and its present participle is *laying*. These words can only be used in a transitive sense—that is, when their "action terminates upon an object," as the grammars say. The verb *lie*, used to denote action, is intransitive; has *lay* for its past tense, *lain* for its perfect participle, and *lying* for its present participle. You should fix these facts in your memory. If you are talking or writing about laying some object down, or laying it upon some other object, or in the sense of handling it and acting upon it, then you should use the appropriate mood and tense of the transitive verb *lay*, as, "I laid the knife upon the table;" "He was laying his overcoat across a chair, as I came in, and I told him not to lay it there, but to lay it on the

table." In speaking of reposing, or of anything in a state of repose, you should use the appropriate parts of the intransitive verb *lie*, as, "I lay upon the grass;" "He was lying on the sofa, where he had lain for three hours." These two verbs are contrasted in the following sentences: "He told me to lay down the pistol, and I laid it down." "He told me to lie down, and I lay down." "A sailor was laying some boards upon the deck of a vessel that was lying at anchor." "A child lay down upon a sofa, and its mother laid a blanket over it." By fixing these distinctions clearly in your memory, you will avoid the common errors of saying, "I laid down and went to sleep;" "The boat was laying at the wharf," etc.

F. F.—We do not know the state in which you are living, and therefore cannot say whether you can get a divorce for desertion. You had better consult a respectable lawyer. That is the only safe course. Do not accept the widower's attentions until you are free to marry him.

LETTIE F.—Your suspicion may be unfounded. Do not allow your imagination to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. Make your husband so happy and contented at home that he will not want any company unshared by his family. A wife seldom gains very much by harshness and recrimination. Endeavour to be nice and agreeable and a good housekeeper.

R. V. W.—You have made a mess of your courtship. It is very foolish to propose by letter when a personal interview is possible. Such proposals are usually made by timid and bashful men and are generally declined. Young ladies admire courage and enterprise in a suitor. You had better retire until you have gained more courage and experience.

N. N. W.—Have you made yourself acceptable by taking her to places of amusement, by giving her little presents of flowers and sweets, and of being very careful of your personal appearance, habits, and manner? These things go very far with the fair sex. Learn her tastes and gratify them. Be enterprising and agreeable, and you will win.

A. J. J.—Ask your uncle's advice and assistance. Young ladies make a very great mistake in not availing themselves of the assistance of their parents or guardians in such matters. Do not hesitate to refer the young gentleman to your uncle. Let him satisfy your uncle of his ability and reputation. If he is worth having he will not fail to do this.

K. L. C.—The gentleman should offer his arm to the lady. It is not proper for a gentleman to take a lady's arm. When invited to call, permit an interval of a week to first elapse before availing yourself of the privilege. It is not customary for a gentleman to make presents to a new acquaintance. You write very well for book-keeping.

DIL DOL.—1. Take no notice of him at all; he will soon get tired of silent contempt. 2. Fair writing. 3. Drop her own eyes, and turn her head the other way. 4. Not if she undertook her business. 5. All depends upon the amount of hard work she has to do, as well as the natural formation of the hand, but sizes would be the average size.

L. P. W.—The best treatment for ink and rust stains consists in the application of two parts of powdered cream of tartar, one part of finely powdered oxalic acid. Shake up the ingredients well together and apply the powder with a dry rag to the dampened stain. When the spot has disappeared the part should be very well washed.

S. C. B.—After procuring a divorce for good and sufficient cause a woman may legally contract another marriage, when the decree has been made absolute for the proper period. Her divorced husband has no rights which she is bound to respect. As to your second question a lawyer would have to be consulted, and all the circumstances of the case considered before any reply could be made.

T. H. H.—The dominical letter denotes the Sabbath, or dies Domini, the Lord's day. The first seven letters of the alphabet are used for this purpose, the same letter standing for Sunday during a whole year, and after twenty-eight years the same letters returning in the same order. The golden number is a number showing the year of the lunar or Metonic cycle. It is reckoned from one to nineteen, and is so called from having formerly been written in the calendar in gold. Full information in regard to the methods of determining these letters can be found in the Church prayer book.

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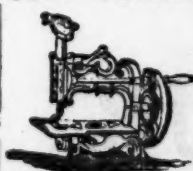
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